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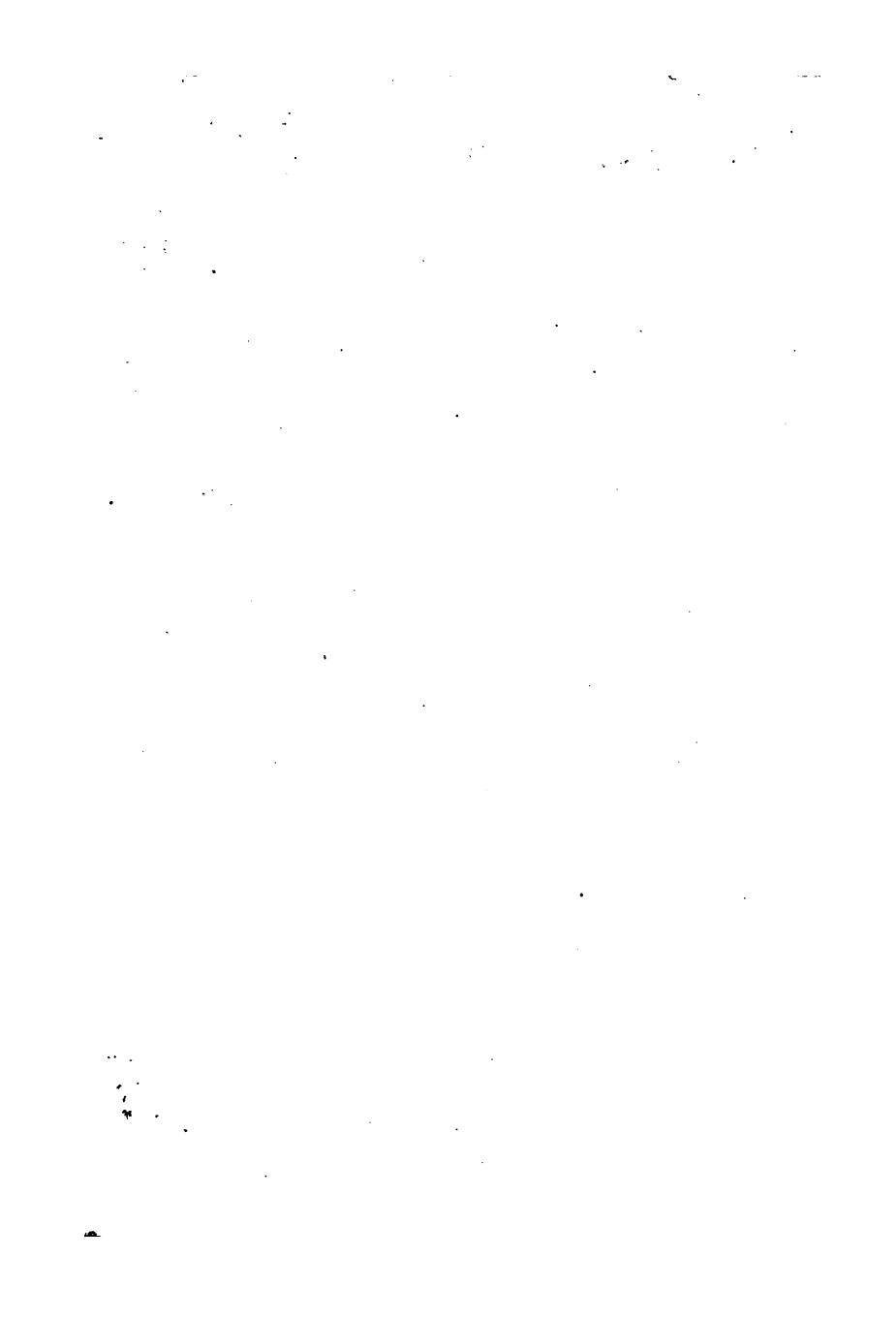


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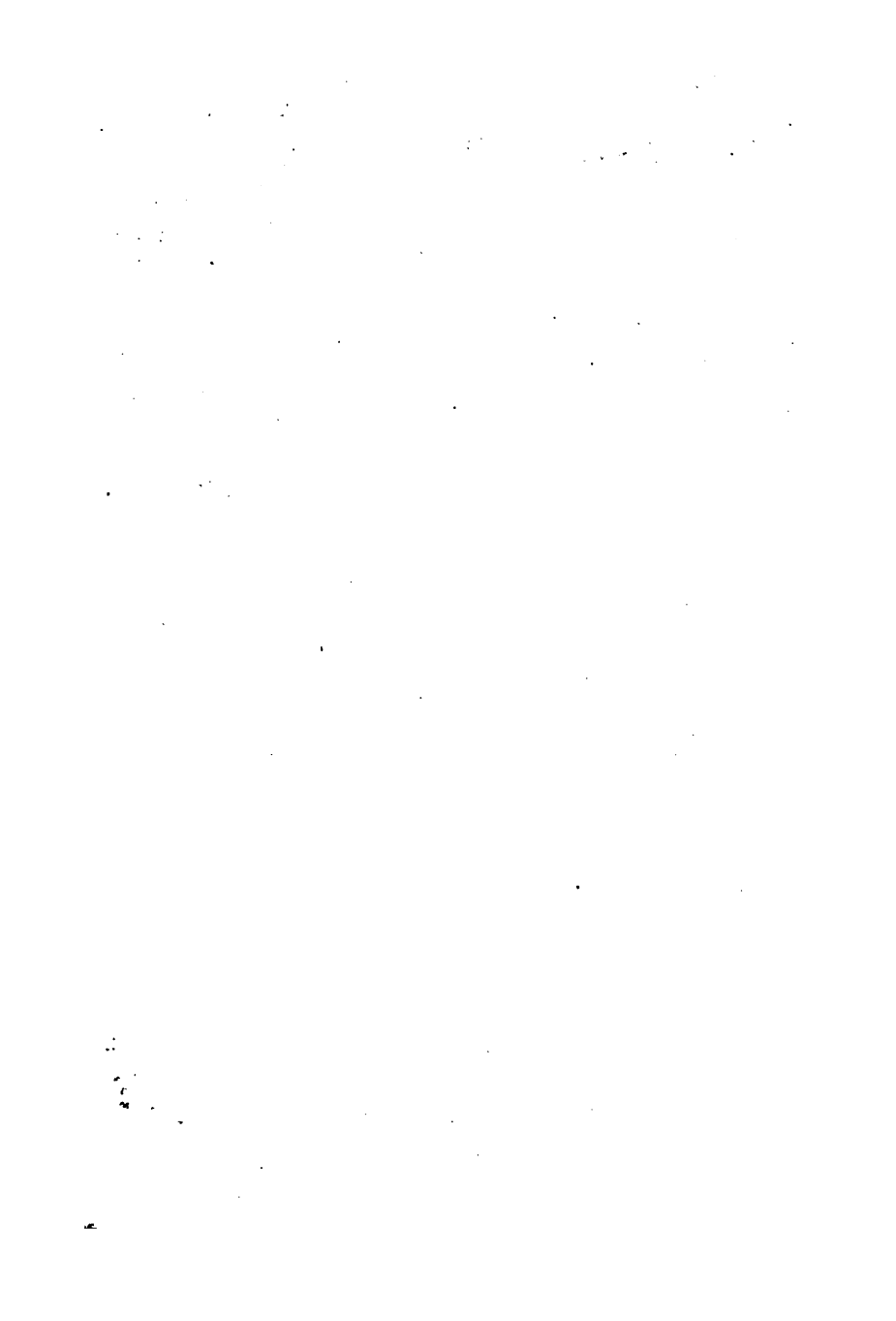
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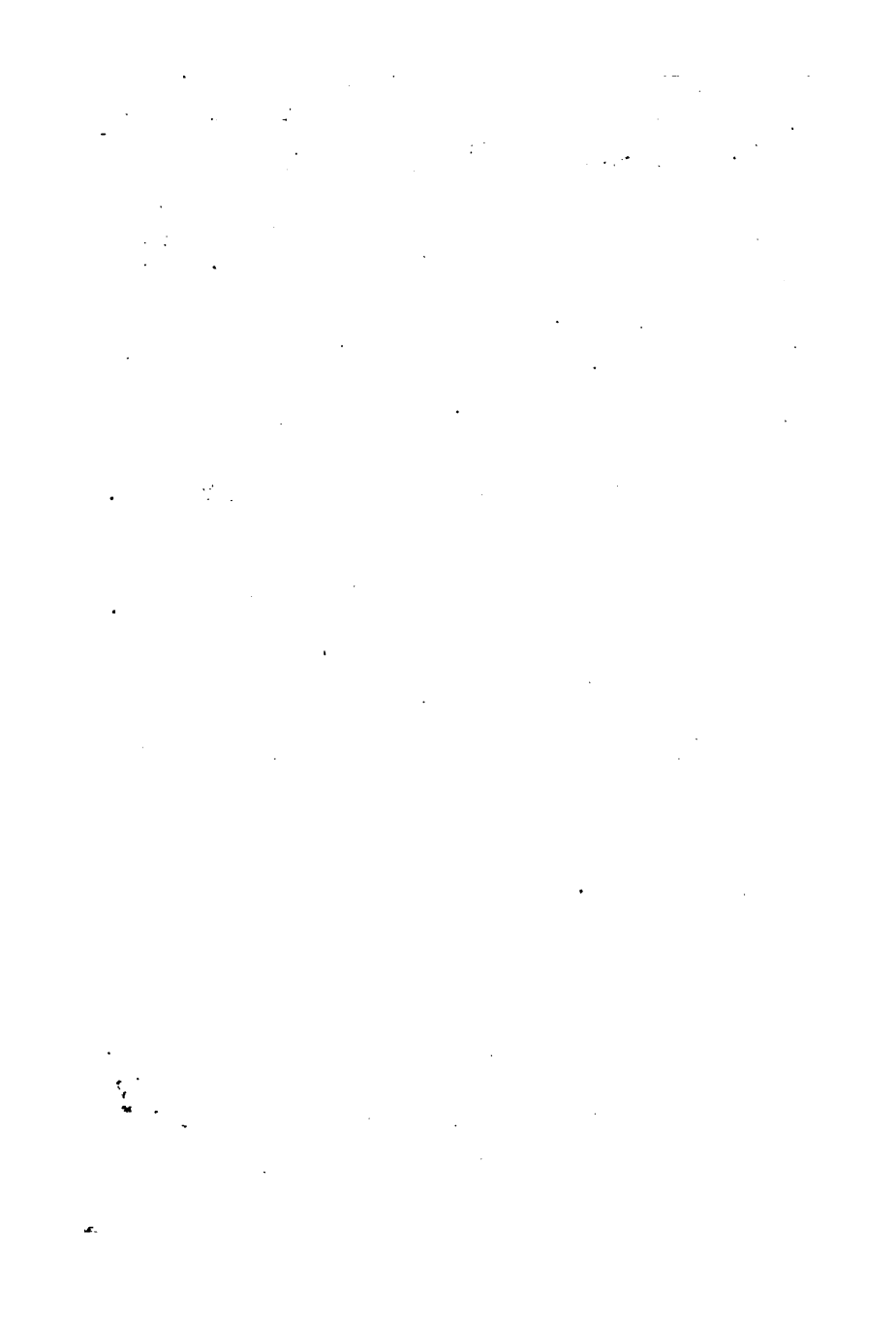


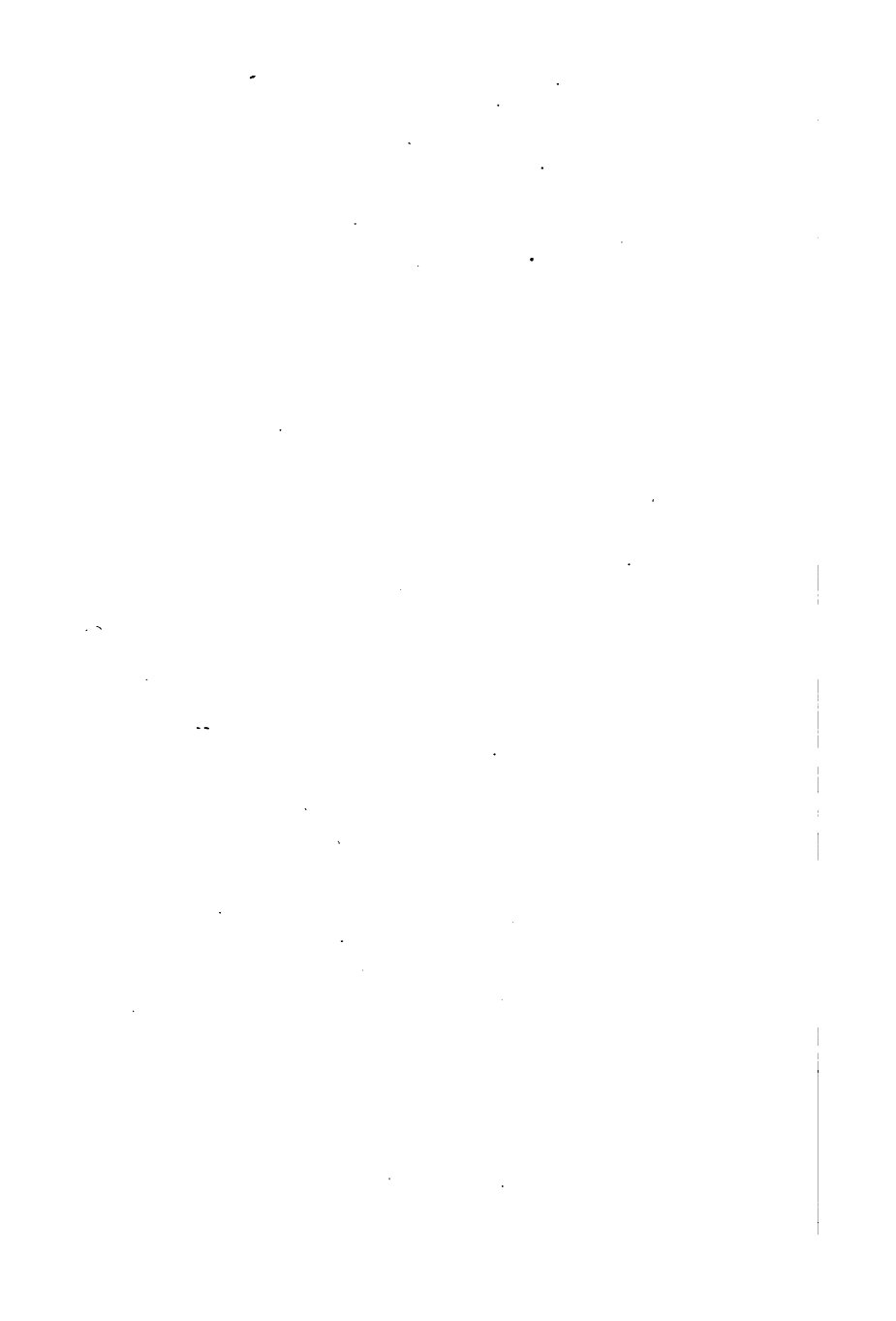












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PREFACE.

AS in the "Stories from English History" prepared for the use of younger children, so in the present work, which is intended as an introduction to a more continuous study of the subject, the main purpose has been to make as prominent as possible the personal career of the chief actors in the several parts of the great drama, and thus to preserve, so far as may be practicable, the biographical form in which Dr. Arnold insisted that history should be presented to the young.

Both in the "Stories" and in the present work the matter is, I hope, so put as to awaken and call into action the reader's powers of thought and judgment. Unless these are exercised throughout, the task of reading history is of not the smallest use. I have, therefore, striven in every case to show why or how far a narrative may or may not be trusted or accepted. From such stories as those of the Massacre of St. Brice, or of the parentage of Thomas of Canterbury, the reader will learn how the various forms of the tale

have been produced, and how the value of each may be ascertained. From the stories of Harold's alleged promise to the Norman duke, and of the advice which he is said to have received from his brother Gyrth before the fight at Senlac, he will learn that even the accounts given by opponents are to be carefully considered and weighed. For both these stories we have only Norman authority. But the English writers, who diligently reply to or refute a vast mass of Norman misrepresentations or falsehoods, do not contradict their statements in these two cases. Hence we may assume that there is some foundation for them, although they may betray not a little exaggeration.

These chapters may also, it is hoped, exhibit the unity of English history, and the continuous political growth of the people from the days of the English Conquest to the time when in the days of Simon of Montfort the English constitution assumed substantially the form which it has retained to the present time—the form, namely, of self-government, in which the nation obeys the laws passed by its own freely-chosen representatives.

The contents prefixed to the volume will serve as a complete chronological table.

CONTENTS.



CHAPTER I.

THE ROMANS AND THEIR INFLUENCE IN BRITAIN.

B.C.		PAGE
55.	First Invasion of Julius Cæsar	1
	The Saxon Shore	1
	The Britons	2
	Phœnician Trade in Britain	2
54.	Second Invasion of Julius Cæsar	3
	Defeat of Caswallon, Cassibelaunus	3
A.D.		
50.	Defeat of Caradoc, Caractacus... ..	3
61.	Revolt and Defeat of Boduc, Bcadicea	4
78.	Conquests of Cneius Julius Agricola	5
	Defeat of Gallawg, Galgacus	5
	State of the Britons under Roman Rule	5
	Roman Architecture and Art in Britain	5
	Roman Castles	6
	Roman Roads	6
	Roman Walls	7
79-85.	Wall of Agricola	7
121.	Wall of Hadrian	7
140.	Wall of Antoninus... ..	7
210.	Wall of Severus	7

CHAPTER II.

WHO THE ENGLISH WERE.

A.D.		PAGE
	Britons and Germans	9
	Condition of the Roman Provinces	9
	Influence of Roman Language and Religion...	10
	Character of the English	10
	English Law	11
	English Families	11
	Teutonic or Dutch Tribes	12
	High and Low German Dialects	12
	Migrations of Aryan Peoples	13

CHAPTER III.

THE COMING OF THE ENGLISH.

	The First Home of the English	14
	The Idea of Country not at first Geographical ...	15
	Origin of the Name English	15
	Condition of the English in their first Home ...	16
	The English Tribes and the Roman Empire ...	16
	Britain and the Roman Empire	17
480-510.	Inroads of Hlodwig (Clovis) into Gaul	17
	Victory of Irmin over the Roman Legions under Varus	18
	Condition of the British Tribes after the Departure of the Romans	18
	The Story of Vortigern and Rowena	19
	Character and Value of the Story	20
	Completeness of the English Conquest	20
	Settlements of Jutes, Angles, Saxons	21

CHAPTER IV.

*THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ENGLISH IN
BRITAIN.*

	Destruction of Roman Towns	22
	The English Mark	22

CONTENTS.

ix

A.D.		PAGE
491.	Foundation of the Kingdom of the South Saxons ...	23
519.	Cerdic forms the Kingdom of the West Saxons (Wessex)	23
	Defeat and Death of Natanleod (Ambrosius Aurelius) at Charford	23
	Conditions of the English Conquest of Britain ...	23
	British Christianity	24
	The Heptarchy	25
	Shires and Kingdoms	25
	English Land Tenure	26

CHAPTER V.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ENGLISH INVADERS.

English Ealdormen, Heretogas, and Kings	27
The Bretwaldas	27
Lack of the Feeling of National Unity	28
Effects of the constant change of Rulers	29
Heathenism of the English Conquerors	29
British Heroes, Natanleod and Arthur	30

CHAPTER VI.

THE CONVERSION OF THE ENGLISH.

The English Invaders and the British Christians ...	32
Story of Gregory the Great and the English Children in the Roman Slave Market	33
Mission of Augustine	34
560-616. Reign of Æthelberht, of Kent	35
Reception of Augustine and his Companions by Æthelberht	37
Life and Writings of Bæda (Venerable Bede) ...	37

CHAPTER XIII.

ALFRED AND THE DANES.

A. D.		PAGE
875.	Ravages of the Danes at Lindisfarne	72
876.	Seizure of Exeter by the Danes	72
	Building of a Fleet by Alfred	73
877.	The Danish Chief Guthrum quits Wessex for Mercia	73
878.	Alfred a Fugitive in Athelney	73
	Stories of Alfred in his time of trouble	74
	Capture of the Raven Standard of Ragnar Lodbrog	75
	Defeat of the Danes by Alfred at Ethandune ...	76
	Peace of Wedmore	76
	The Denelagu	77
	Alfred's Work as a Lawgiver and as a Teacher ...	77
901.	Death of Alfred	78

CHAPTER XIV.

*FORTUNES OF THE ENGLISH KINGDOM AND
CHURCH, FROM 901 to 954.*

901.	Election of Edward, Son of Alfred	79
	Principle of Royal Election	79
925.	Election of Æthelstan, Son of Edward	79
	Story of the Commendation of Scotland and Wales to Edward	80
936.	Battle of Brunanburg	81
941-946.	Reign of Edinund, Son of Æthelstan	81
946.	Election of Eadred, Brother of Edmund	81
	Retirement of the Chancellor Turketul to Croyland	82

CHAPTER XV.

EADWIG, DUNSTAN, AND THE CLERGY.

955-958.	Reign of Eadwig (the Fair). Nephew of Eadred	83
	Dunstan, Abbot of Glastonbury	83
	English Monarchism	84
	The Secular and Regular Clergy	84

CONTENTS.

xiii

A.D.		PAGE
	Synod at Calne	84
	Coronation of Eadwig	85
	Question of the Marriage of the Clergy	87
958.	Election of Eadgar (the Peaceful), under-king of Mercia, as King of Wessex	87

CHAPTER XVI.

REIGNS OF EADGAR AND ÆTHELRED.

	Relations of Eadgar with the Danes	88
	Wolf Tribute imposed on the Welsh	89
973.	Coronation of Eadgar at Bath	89
	Eadgar and the Vassal Kings at Chester	89
	Marriage of Eadgar with Ælfhryth (Elfrida)	90
975.	Death of Eadgar, and Election of his Son Edward	91
978.	Murder of Edward, and Election of his Brother Æthelred (the Unready)	91
	Renewed and more systematic Incursions of the Danes	93
993.	Battle of Maldon	93
	Attempts of Æthelred to buy off the Danes with Money	94

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DANISH INVASIONS AND THE MASSACRE OF ST. BRICE.

992.	Treachery of the Ældorman Ælfric	95
994.	Invasion of Swend, King of Denmark, and Olaf of Norway	95
	Departure of the Invaders after wintering at Southampton	96
926.	English Invasion of Normandy	97
1000.	Marriage of Æthelred with Emma of Normandy	98
	Renewed Danish Ravages—Treachery of Pallig	98
1002.	Massacre of St. Brice's Day	99
	Execution of Gunhild, Sister of Swend and Wife of Pallig	101

CHAPTER XVIII.

INVASION OF SWEND, KING OF DENMARK.

A.D.		PAGE
1003.	Return of Swend to England	101
	Career of Eadric Streone	102
	Renewed Treachery of Ælfric	104
1004.	Burning of Norwich by the Danes	105
	Battle of Thetford	105

CHAPTER XIX.

DEPOSITION AND FLIGHT OF ÆTHELRED.

	Destruction of the English Fleet	106
1012.	Murder of Ælfheah (Alphege), Archbishop of Canterbury	107
	Thurkhill, the Dane, passes over to the Service of Æthelred	108
1013.	March of Swend to Bath, where he is received as King	108
1014.	Flight of Æthelred to Normandy	109
	Death of Swend	109

CHAPTER XX.

*THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN EDMUND IRONSIDE
AND CNUT.*

	Recall of Æthelred	110
	Murder of Sigefirth and Morcar by Eadric Streone	110
1015.	Marriage of the Ætheling Edmund (Ironside) with the Widow of Sigefirth	112
	Treachery of Eadric Streone	112
1016.	Death of Æthelred—Election of Edmund Ironside	113
	Battles of Pen Selwood and Sherstone	114

CONTENTS.

XV

CHAPTER XXI.

DEATH OF EDMUND IRONSIDE.

A.D.	PAGE
Third Victory of Edmund over the Danes	115
Battle of Brentford	115
Defeat of Edmund at Assundun, owing, it is said, to the Treachery of Eadric	115
Partition of the Country between Edmund and Cnut, arranged at the Conference of Olney	116
Death of Edmund—Election of Cnut, who becomes King of all the Land	116

CHAPTER XXII.

CONDITION AND HABITS OF THE ENGLISH PEOPLE.

Character and Life of the Early English Settlers ...	118
Vast Changes in the Condition of the Country ...	119

CHAPTER XXIII.

OLD ENGLISH HOUSES AND HOME LIFE.

Arrangements of an English Mansion in the Seventh Century	123
---	-----

CHAPTER XXIV.

FEUDALISM, AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE.

English Slavery	125
Villinage—Ceorls, or Churls	127
Lord and Vassal	127
Tithings and Hundreds	128
Principle of Compurgation	128
Punishments and Fines	129

CHAPTER XXV.

THE REIGN OF CNUT (CANUTE).

A.D.		PAGE
	Crimes of Cnut as King	130
	Marriage of Cnut with Emma, Widow of Æthelred	131
1017.	Gemot of London—Death of Eadric Streone ...	132
	The Four English Earldoms	132
1018.	Cnut levies the Dane-geld, and forms the Force of Thingamen or House-carls	133

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE REIGN OF CNUT (continued).

	Demand for the Laws of King Edgar	133
1020.	Godwine, Earl, or Viceroy, of Wessex	135
1027.	Pilgrimage of Cnut to Rome	135
	General Character of his Reign	136

CHAPTER XXVII.

REIGNS OF HAROLD AND OF HARTHACNUT.

1035.	Death of Cnut	136
	Division of the Land between Harold (Harefoot) and Harthacnut (Hardicanute)	137
	Landing and Murder of Ælfred, Brother of Edward the Confessor	137
1037.	Deposition of Harthacnut	139
	Death of Harold, followed by the Election of Harthacnut as King of all the Land	139
1042.	Murder of House-carls at Worcester	139
	Death of Harthacnut	139
	Election of Edward the Confessor	139
	Reasons for the Choice	140
	Character and Motives of Edward	141
	Influence of Earl Godwine	142



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CHAPTER I.

THE ROMANS, AND THEIR INFLUENCE IN BRITAIN.

IF we speak of written records, the history of this country, as an island of the great northern sea, begins with the invasion of Julius Cæsar (B.C. 55). But it may be safely said that this history has very little to do with the fortunes of the English people for more than four centuries after the landing of the great Roman general on the Kentish coast.

There can be no doubt that German rovers, or pirates, who may have been Saxons or English, or, at least, were closely akin to them, had become an object of dread for some time before the Roman legions were withdrawn from the island, for we hear of an officer who was called the Count of the Saxon Shore; and it

is more likely that he was so called because Saxons were already settled upon it, than simply because it was feared that they might come. This seems to be rendered more likely by the fact of our finding a Saxon Shore at Beyeux, where there was a Saxon settlement, and again in Belgica Secunda, or Flanders.

But as yet these strangers were at best mere intruders, who remained more on sufferance than by virtue of their own strength and power. The people to whom the generals of Honorius abandoned the island when, in the early part of the fifth century, they hurried away to defend the empire against barbarian inroads, were not the English, but Britons, such as still inhabit Wales and Brittany, or the north-western corner of the country now called France.

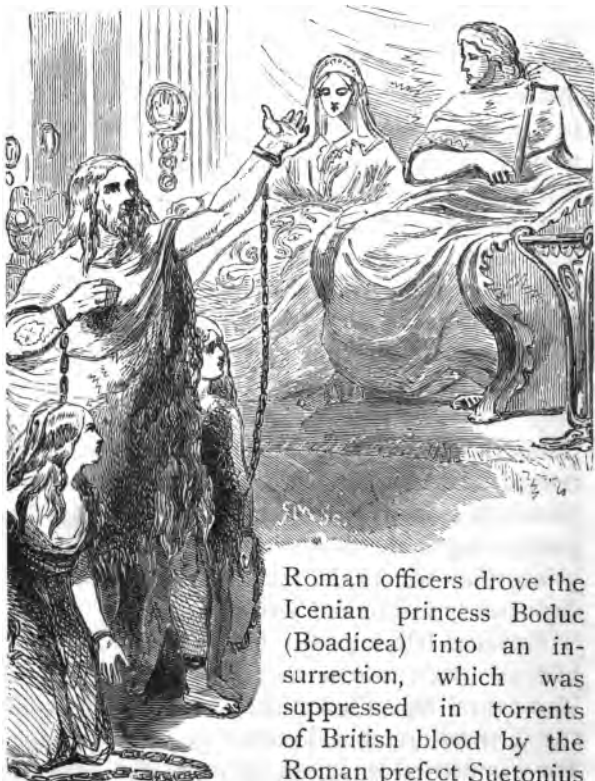
Of these Britons, or of their country, nothing is known historically before the days of Cæsar. Phœnicians may have worked the tin and lead mines of Cornwall, and the trade may have been carried on by means of ships which sailed into the Mediterranean between the Pillars of Hercules (now called the Straits of Gibraltar) ; or it may have crossed the Channel in its narrower parts, and gone, like the amber trade from the Baltic, overland to Marseilles. But the history of their trade gives us no knowledge of the Britons, and attempts to put together any account of this early time can be little better than guess-work.

When, in the first century of our era, the Romans fixed themselves here, in the reign of the Emperor Claudius, who visited Britain A.D. 43, things were at once changed. The southern part of the country was now in the hands of men who had long been accustomed to preserve written records of their doings, and who were great builders and engineers, great leaders and soldiers and statesmen. From this time until they abandoned the island, we know how things went much better than we know how they went after they left the Britons to themselves.

Their task in managing the country was never a very easy one, and was sometimes very hard. On his second invasion, B.C. 54, Cæsar was stoutly opposed by a British chief named Caswallon, or, as the Romans called him, Cassibelaunus, who, although driven to beg for peace, was more fortunate than the Silurian¹ prince Caradoc (or, in the Latin form, Caraëta-cus), nearly a hundred years later.

Caradoc fell into the hands of his enemies after a battle where the two streams of the Terne and the Colne meet near the foot of the Shropshire hill known as Caer-Caradoc. He was carried to Rome, to grace the triumph of the victorious general; but the Emperor Claudius, struck with his bold bearing, not only, it is said, gave him his liberty, but restored to him some portion of his lost dominion.

About ten years after the defeat of Caradoc, A.D. 61, the greed and brutal wickedness of



CARACTACUS BEFORE
THE EMPEROR CLAUDIUS.

Roman officers drove the Icenian princess Bodicea (Boadicea) into an insurrection, which was suppressed in torrents of British blood by the Roman prefect Suetonius Paulinus. The conquest

of the island was carried as far as the Firth of Forth, seventeen years later, A.D. 78, by the well-known Cneius Julius Agri-

cola, the father-in-law of the historian Tacitus, who defeated the Caledonians under their chief Gallawg, called by the Romans Galgacus.

These events, we must never forget, do not belong to the history of England or of the English. But they serve to show us in what way and how far the Roman power was fixed in the island. The fact of most importance for us to remember is that under the Roman rule the Britons became familiar with all the forms of Roman civilization. They saw their conquerors constructing great roads from one end of the land to the other. They saw them also build large cities, with beautiful dwelling-houses and baths, with courts of justice and temples, with amphitheatres and fortresses; and in the raising of these structures and their adornment they were themselves called upon to take part.

There is no reason for doubting that in time they became scarcely less skilful than their masters; and it is not unlikely that the beautiful work still to be seen in the ruins of the great Roman town of Silbury, and elsewhere, came from the hands of Britons trained to carve the graceful capitals of Corinthian and Composite columns.² It is, indeed, not very easy for us to realize how much the Romans did for the distant island which had become a province of the empire; but those who have seen the remains of Roman work and of Roman or native art in York, Chester, and

some other cities, will form some idea of the richness and even the splendour of their buildings, and of the modes in which they decorated them. They will there have looked upon costly mosaics, carefully worked tiles, graceful lamps in iron and bronze, highly wrought jewellery, and many other things which throw light on their manner of living in this country.

But they did not concern themselves only with the luxuries of life. They built strong castles, which they called *castra*, fortified camps. Of these, one of the greatest was at the place still known simply as Chester; others were built at Winchester, Dorchester, Doncaster, and all the other places whose names end with the word *chester* or *caster*.

They also constructed magnificent roads, some of which are as strong and solid now as when they were laid down. Among the most important of these were the roads known as Watling Street, which extended from Kent to Cardigan Bay; Irmin Street, which connected St. David's with Southampton Water; the Foss-way, which went from Cornwall to Lincoln; and Ikenild Street, which, starting from Tynemouth, was also carried to the place now known as St. David's, by way of York, Derby, and Birmingham.

They also thought that much might be done to strengthen their dominion by means of walls, which should prevent the incursions of

savage tribes beyond the border. Thus the great general Agricola built a wall extending eighty miles, from the Tyne to the Solway Firth, A.D. 79-85. Another wall was carried from the Firth of Forth to that of the Clyde. Of these walls, the former was strengthened by the Emperor Hadrian, A.D. 121, and again nearly a hundred years later by the Emperor Severus, who died at York A.D. 211. The other was repaired by Lollius Urbicus at the beginning of the reign of Antoninus Pius, about A.D. 140. Hence these walls bear respectively the names of the Emperors Hadrian, Severus, and Antoninus.

The Britons, on becoming subjects of the empire, were firmly ruled by their masters; but they were not degraded, except in so far as a liking for the luxuries introduced among them may have weakened their ancient vigour. We have, however, no fair grounds for thinking that they were at any time a people capable of offering combined and systematic resistance to a well-disciplined and determined enemy; and after the departure of the Roman legions it soon became clear that the civilization which they had learnt or borrowed from their masters was for the most part merely on the surface. They ceased, it seems, to build, or to preserve the buildings which they had raised; they made no additions to the number of their roads and bridges; and, in short, they showed that they were not a people likely to hold their

own against men, if such should come, who made robbery and slaughter the business of their lives.

We must not, however, suppose that on the withdrawal of the Roman legions the Britons became simply what they had been before the eagles of Cæsar were seen upon the shores of Kent. They had, in whatever measure, learnt by experience the advantages of law and order over brute force and anarchy. They had been heathens ; they were now Christians, and, as such, they had been brought within the great community of European Christendom.

But from the fact that Britain was an island, the work of imperial Rome was at no time more than half done in it. Her speech was never anything more than the speech of military occupants of the country ; and the religion of the empire only made those who professed it more hateful in the eyes of heathen invaders.

¹ By the name Silures the Romans designated the Welsh or British tribe who inhabited the country between the Severn and the Nedd (Swansea Bay).

² The capitals of pillars in the later orders of Greek and Roman architecture.

CHAPTER II.

WHO THE ENGLISH WERE.

THE first alarms of the forsaken Britons came from the north of the island, from tribes com-

monly known as Picts and Scots, which may possibly have been more nearly akin to Teutons or Germans than to Celts ; but they soon found that a more serious danger menaced them from another quarter, and that the Romans had full grounds for the precautions which they had taken on what they called the Saxon shore.

The German foreigners, who found their way thither, like those over whom the Count of the Saxon Shore had been set to keep watch, were men of stout hearts, sturdy limbs, and vigorous wills ; and at first the Britons saw in them excellent soldiers for fighting the battles in which they did not greatly care to risk their own lives. In truth, the new-comers were people of a very different kind from any with whom the Britons had thus far had to deal.

The Romans, so far as they were Romans, belonged to a state which had grown old, which had lost the spirit of earlier times, and which was ruled by a single despot, called the Emperor or Emperor. The Roman empire had almost overspread the world. But it was kept up mainly by armies in which the greater number of the soldiers were not Romans at all ; and in this point there was little or no difference between the Roman garrisons in Britain and Roman garrisons elsewhere.

These Roman garrisons were not likely therefore to be specially successful as political teachers to the populations over which they

kept guard, or to fill them with hearty admiration for the principles of Roman law and government. Still less were they likely to foster in them the spirit which strengthens a people to resist aggression from without, to repress evils within, and to promote the unity which springs from independence of thought and from a willing obedience to law.

As included in the empire, they were simply the servants of an absolute master far away, and the people among whom they served or to whom they belonged were not nations, but simply provincials, or, in other words, subjects of a universal empire under a single despot. So long as they had safety of person and property, what mattered it whether they came of the Gaulish, the Thracian,¹ or any other stock or race? Was not the empire everywhere? Did not its speech go through all lands? So the spell worked; and those who, coming to conquer and slay, attacked the imperial provinces on the mainland of Europe, forgot in a little while their own language, and adopted not only the speech but the religion of those among whom they found themselves.

Quite unlike these subjects of a power which wrapped every one in the swaddling-bands of a system which worked much like a machine, the new German rovers who found their way to Britain were a people in the stage of early growth, with many of the worst faults of youth,

rash, headstrong, quarrelsome, greedy, violent, and cruel. Absolutely without fear, they could not understand how others could feel it, and looked on all such as on game to be hunted down without mercy. Always ready for hard work, hard marching, and hard fighting, they were also ready for the pleasures of eating and drinking which they thought should follow seasons of effort and toil. They would gorge and swill until they were senseless; nor did they think the worse of each other or of themselves for their gluttony and their drunkenness.

But there was a brighter side to the picture. These merciless plunderers and slayers of their enemies, that is, of all who did not belong to their own people, had also a belief in the necessity of order and law, out of which great things were to spring. They knew nothing of the despotism of one man ruling his subjects according to his own fancy. They had their chiefs, and these chiefs were intrusted with great power; but everything lay in the fact that this power was a trust, and that this trust was to be exercised for the good of the people, who themselves took part in the work of government.

The chiefs were the leaders of freemen who had full right of speech in the common assembly, and who, if they did wrong, must be punished, not by the mere will of one man, but only after trial before their peers or equals. Above all,

they were men who believed that order and law begin in each man's house, that there is something sacred in the relations of parents and children, of husbands and wives, of brothers and sisters, and that the vices which do violence to these relations are beyond any others to be hated and put down. They were, in short, men who believed that none could be properly governed unless they helped to govern themselves, and that no people could be really powerful unless they were free, paying a willing obedience to laws which they themselves had made.

All these good qualities gave them a great advantage over people who, like the Romans, had given themselves up to the most debasing vices, and had cast to the winds all thought of duty, or of any obedience except to constraining force ; or who, like the Britons, could not stand together against a common enemy, and who seemed not to know that a number of weak sticks may make a very strong faggot, if they are properly tied together.

These fierce rovers and plunderers, who were soon to drive the Britons to the western mountains, belonged to tribes whom we call Teutonic, and who, using another form of the same name, called themselves Dutch, or Deutsch. The word denotes simply a people ; but Teutonic is a convenient name for describing all the tribes who speak either High German or Low

German dialects, dialects so distinguished simply as being spoken by peoples high up or low down the banks of the Rhine, the Elbe, or the Oder.

Strangely unlike as these invaders were to the Britons whom they were now to conquer, we do not mean that they came wholly of a different stock. There had been probably a time (how long past we cannot say) when the forefathers of Britons and Teutons, of Franks and Romans, of Persians, Hindus, Greeks, and Russians, all had a common home somewhere in the high tablelands of Central Asia ; but, happily or unhappily, separation even for a few years will do much to make brothers and sisters, parents and children, strange and even repulsive to each other. We need not therefore wonder that the separation of ages should leave even closely kindred tribes with scarcely a point of likeness between them.

The common Aryan people, from whom have sprung almost all the nations of Europe, were divided into three or four great companies, which started on the long journey for homes unknown. One company turned to the south, and found their way into India and Persia. A second went westwards, and became the fathers of Greeks and Latins. A third and a fourth went to the north and north-west, reaching Europe and still moving westwards, being separated from each other by long intervals of time. Of the incidents

of their wanderings, and of the difficulties which they had to fight with and to overcome, we know nothing.

The first, probably, of these Aryan tribes to find their way into this country were those whom we call Celts or Britons, but who called, and still call, themselves Cymry, or Gael; and on the descendants of these early settlers the yoke of Roman conquest lay heavy for perhaps four centuries, before the Romans felt any serious fear that dangers threatened them from the hardy seamen who steered their little ships across the sea which lies between the mouth of the Thames and the Elbe.

¹ The Gauls were a race very widely spread to the north of the Po, over the greater part of what is now known as northern Italy and France. By Thracians the Greeks denoted highland or mountain clans, especially those who dwelt between the Balkans and the Black Sea.

CHAPTER III.

THE COMING OF THE ENGLISH.

THUS from the unknown east to the low and dreary marsh-grounds running out between the estuaries of the Elbe and the Oder into the peninsula still known as the land of the Jutes or Jutland, and stretching on either side to the east and the west, came in times long past Frisians, Danes, Jutes, Goths, Angles or English, and Saxons.

It would be rash to speak positively of the order of their coming, or of the origin of their names. All that we know is that not one of their names is what we should call a local or a geographical name. Not one of these tribes ever supposed that their land was anywhere but where they were dwelling. Angles or English, Saxons, Jutes, or Goths, carried England, Saxony, Juteland, and Gothland, with them wherever they might go. The Greek, when he went forth from his metropolis or mother-city, took his home with him, and his home remained a portion of Hellas (Greece) as much as the lands of the kinsfolk from whom he was parted. The Great Hellas, or Great Greece (*Magna Græcia*, as the Latins called it), was, indeed, not in the region which lay between the Olympian heights and the cliffs of Malea, but on Italian soil ; and in the same way the English went forth from the banks of the Elbe to win for themselves and to establish a mightier England in the great island of the western sea.

Beyond the country which they left, and which is for us the older England, we are unable to trace their fortunes ; nor can we even venture to say with any assurance how they got their name. Most certainly it was not because either there or elsewhere they lived in an angle or nook, or because, according to Pope Gregory, they had the faces of angels.

But, whatever may have been the meaning

or origin of their name, here in their home between the Elbe and the Oder they abode for generations, knowing that when the bounds of the land became too narrow for their growing numbers, some among them must seek new homes either by marching westwards and southwards or by crossing the western sea. At no time, perhaps, were they wholly at rest ; but everywhere, except in the island of Britain, they would find themselves sooner or later face to face with barriers not easily surmounted, and an enemy not easily overcome.

The enemy thus strongly guarded was the Roman Empire, which even in its decay was strong in the life imparted to it by the laws, the arts, the manners, the discipline of the sovereign people who, starting from the seven hills on the banks of the Tiber, had made themselves masters of the world. Their empire, and the society which grew up with it, showed themselves possessed of a magic charm. Barbarians, and even savages, might assail it ; but if they were not driven back, they were slowly but surely absorbed into its mighty mass, forgetting in great part their language, their laws, and their religion, and adopting those of the people whom they conquered.

Thus the Franks, over whom Charles the Great was king, A.D. 768-804, the Northmen who followed Hrolf (Rollo, 885-912) to the banks of the Seine, or who fought their way

into Apulia or Sicily under the Guiscards, 1050-1100, were as much Teutonic as we are ; but they could not withstand the spell of Roman civilization. All learnt to speak what are called Romance languages, and in some lands they gradually disappeared altogether in the mass of the conquered population.

A wholly different lot awaited them in the great island which lay not very many miles to the west of the lowlands of the Elbe. Here Roman law and civilization had not struck their roots deep into the heart of the people, and the polish on the surface was soon rubbed off. Just because it was an island, Britain had never become a part of the empire in the sense in which Gaul and Spain became parts of it ; and just because the English and their kinsfolk came from regions which the Roman emperors had been unable to reach, their settlement in Britain had results wholly different from those which followed the inroads of Hlodwig (Clovis) (480-510) into the plains of Gaul.

From lands where the dominion of Rome was thoroughly established, and between which there were no geographical barriers, the speech and the civilization of Rome have never been dislodged. Invader after invader may have crossed the borders of the empire, but all have yielded to the spell. It was so with every people from the Mediterranean gates to the banks of the Rhine ; and so would it have

been to those of the Elbe and the Oder, had not the Roman legions under Varus been smitten down in the Teutoburg wood by the battle-axes of Irmin (Arminius) and his countrymen, A.D. 9. If these legions had won a victory as decisive as their defeat, our forefathers would have become Roman provincials (page 10) after the fashion of Gauls and Spaniards, and the world would have known nothing of the life of the English in Britain, or of the still mightier England which has sprung into existence and is spreading far and wide in America and Australia.

The half-Romanized Britons would have found it a hard task probably to withstand their northern neighbours, if these had been their only enemies. But they were hopelessly over-weighted when they encountered the new foes who came from over the sea. That the inroads of the latter were constant, and that they found work to do and plunder to get along many parts of the coast, we may be very sure.

But of the order of their coming we know only that Saxons must have formed the vanguard, for none others are named as persons to be watched by the Roman prefect of the Saxon Shore, and by this name only (Sassenach) do the descendants of the British tribes in Wales and Scotland know the whole body of Teutonic invaders, whether these be Danes, English, Saxons, or Jutes. They may have come at

first, it is possible, in no very rough guise, and may have been found useful as soldiers by British chiefs. There is, therefore, nothing in



ROWENA BEFORE VORTIGERN

itself incredible in the story which relates the fortunes of Vortigern and the maiden to whom is given the imaginary name of Rowena.

The tale is soon told
Rowena, it is said, was the daughter of Hengist
and niece of Horsa. chieftains sprung from
Woden, the god of the blue heaven. In the

great house which her father built in Thanet, her beauty kindled the love of the British prince Vortigern, before whom she appeared as cup-bearer, and who made her his wife, endowing her father with a wide and rich domain. But Vortigern's son Vortemar had no feelings of fondness for the foreigner, whom he drove clean out of the land. During the rest of Vortemar's life Hengist and his followers were homeless ; but on his death Hengist came back to claim the lands which had been bestowed upon him. A council was summoned ; but the Saxon chief bade his people come armed, and to slay the Britons when he should cry out, "Nemeth yure seaxe" (Draw your daggers). All fell except Vortigern, who added to the lands of Hengist, and so made him the chief of a powerful people.

The story does not hang very well together ; but as it would serve to show that the strangers came first as friends, and that their settlement here was the result of peaceful treaties, it would naturally obtain belief among those over whose cowardice it would throw a veil. Its worthlessness is shown by the fact that it is not found in the earliest records on either side. These earlier records (and that of Gildas is not greatly more recent than the time of which it speaks) tell us only of thorough and systematic conquest mercilessly carried out—a conquest which either destroyed the old inhabitants or drove

them westwards until they reached the fastnesses of the Welsh hills ; that is, the hills of the Wealas or foreigners, for the Welsh no more call themselves Welsh than the Germans call themselves Germans.

But it is impossible to slay a whole people ; and if the women become in a body the wives of the conquerors, the children are as likely to avenge the wrongs of their mothers as to extend the dominion of their fathers. The very small number of Welsh words in the English vocabulary even for objects of domestic use is better proof that the invaders brought their women with them, than is the mention of Rowena as dwelling in the halls of her father Hengist.

Thus the land of Britain became the home of a people belonging to several Teutonic tribes, who, as soon as they began to speak of themselves collectively, called themselves Englishmen. In different parts of the land there were settlements of Jutes, of Saxons, and of Angles ; and to show his nearest kindred a man might call himself a Saxon or a Jute, while in contrast with the British or Celtic tribes all were English.

But at no time was Anglo-Saxon the name of a people. The kings of Wessex, who became lords of the men of Anglia, called themselves kings of the Angles and the Saxons ; and the title in its shortened form marked them as

kings of Anglo-Saxons, of whom we seldom, if ever, hear except with reference to their sovereignty. A man calling himself an Anglo-Saxon could not be found "within the four seas."

CHAPTER IV.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ENGLISH IN BRITAIN.

IN this sweeping fashion was the Teutonic conquest of Britain carried out. How far it affected the general appearance of the country we cannot say. Even before their final inroads, the great Roman works were, in all likelihood, falling into decay; and it is certain that the destruction of some of the Roman towns was the result of the struggle. The walls of Anderida still remain to attest the craft of the Roman builders; but within the walls every building was swept away, and the neighbouring West Ham and Pevensey, the "island" of a chief named "Peofn" (Peven), became the abodes of the invaders, who refused to dwell within the circle of the old defences.

The English in their new, as in their old, home were no lovers of cities. The mark (or ground-plot) of each freeman was as dear to him here as it had been in Elbe or Oder land;

and the desire awakened in him by the sight of great cities was rather to destroy than to preserve.

But the work of the strangers was not done in a day or in a year. The old chronicle tells us of battles fought by Ælle and his sons, who founded the kingdom of the South Saxons (Sussex), A.D. 491 ; by Cerdic, who, 519, became chief of the West Saxons (Wessex), having slain Natanleod¹ and five thousand Britons on the banks of the Avon. The records of the struggle are meagre enough ; but their very scantiness is decisive proof of the vast differences of condition under which the English conquest of Britain was achieved, as contrasted with Teutonic inroads into Roman provinces on the mainland of Europe. The latter involved no uprooting of civilisation, of religion, and of law, for the invaders themselves had, even before they left their homes, felt the influence of imperial Rome, and were fully conscious of their own inferiority in many ways.

These provinces of the mainland were, moreover, integral portions of the empire at the time when the barbarians burst into them. Britain had been cast aside as a dangerous or a worthless possession ; and Britain was invaded by men who had never come directly under Roman influence, and probably knew nothing more of the empire than what they may have

learnt from the traditions relating to the exploits and the victory of Irmin (A.D. 9, see page 18). Elsewhere the speech of Cæsar had become the speech of all the people; in Britain it had taken as little root as the speech of the English has thus far taken in India, and it had in all likelihood passed away altogether before the great struggle with the German invaders began.

In Europe, then, these inroads caused no sweeping destruction; in Britain the changes wrought could scarcely have been more thorough. They extended even to the great body of names throughout the country; and the new names point to the incoming of a people who knew little of Roman fashions, and cared for them still less, and who were moved by a fierce hatred of tribes with whom they were resolved to wage a deadly war. On the mainland there was little or no interference with the working of the Christian Church, or with the authority of its clergy; in Britain the extermination of the inhabitants involved the uprooting of Christianity, and the fierce heathenism of the invaders had full swing for a century and a half, before Augustine and his companions committed themselves to the task of conquering it.

The incoming of the German invaders thus involved in Britain a complete severance between the old state of things and the new; and the

issue was the establishment of a number of Teutonic kingdoms, or rather principalities, said sometimes to have been seven, and therefore called the Heptarchy. But in truth it is almost impossible to trace the changes through which some at least of these kingdoms passed, or the manner in which they rose and fell; and it would be only partially true to say that these kingdoms survive in our counties. They may do so in some cases; but in Kent it has been remarked that the two sees of Canterbury and Rochester bear witness to the existence of two distinct kingdoms within the present shire, while the Chronicle speaks of no less than five kings of the West Saxons as slain in a single battle by the Northumbrian chief Edwin in the year 626. Of the origin of the kingdom of Mercia, the march, or border, land, on the Welsh side, we know nothing; but we find it a powerful state at the end of the sixth century.

That this multitude of petty kingdoms should remain long isolated or distinct was in the nature of things impossible. There was necessarily a constant tendency towards the absorption of the smaller principalities in the dominions of the more vigorous and successful chieftains; and the disappearance of the kingdom in no way affected the life or the condition of its people.

This condition was strictly one of growth upwards. Its foundations were laid in the

mark, which assigned the holding of land to families in parcels, the arable land passing at definite intervals from one man to another, and the waste land being held in common by the whole body. These parcels together formed a township; and after the conversion of the people to Christianity, the township in its ecclesiastical aspect became a parish. The township or parish had its head man and its meetings for the management of its own concerns; and the same system was applied to the union of townships in a hundred, and of hundreds in a shire.

The whole people were being educated, therefore, (slowly, it may be, and rudely, but surely) in the school of self-government; and hence it made little difference whether the chiefs of the shire-mote regarded as their master the king of the West or the king of the South Saxons. The system was one which marvelously fostered the spirit of personal freedom; but it became in the long run a great hindrance to the growth of a national feeling, and in the end brought about the catastrophe of the Norman conquest.

¹ This leader is probably the same as Ambrosius Aurelius, a chieftain of Roman descent, and perhaps one of the British provincial emperors. The name Natanleod denotes "Prince of the Sanctuary," the sanctuary being probably the church of Amesbury.

CHAPTER V.


CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ENGLISH INVADERS

WE may say, in short, that the main characteristic of the Teutonic invaders was a voluntary obedience to law and to authority constituted by law. The title of the ruler was a matter of comparative indifference. In their home on the mainland, the English had lived under Ealdormen (aldermen or elders), and heretogas, or dukes, not under kings; and it was by chiefs so-called that the conquest of Britain was achieved. But within a generation some of these chiefs are found to have attained the dignity of kingship; and some, again, acquired, by whatever means, a certain authority or supremacy over the princes of the inferior states.

Of these kings eight are named in the Chronicle as having been invested with the title of Bretwalda. The origin and meaning of the name are matters of dispute. That it had nothing to do with any scheme for keeping up the idea of an empire of the west, we may be sure; that the dignity was conferred by election, we may very fairly assume. But whatever be the points which we must leave undetermined, the fact that among the several kings or chiefs some attained to pre-eminence, and established their power on a solid basis, remains unaffected.

The history of these kingdoms, intricate and obscure though it may be, is full of interest and value for those who are really anxious to know how the constitution, the laws, and the life of Englishmen have been shaped. But it is also a history which, it must be confessed, has its repulsive side, exhibiting a vast amount of brutality and a very small amount of fair and kindly dealing. It is disfigured by a disunion and an incapacity for joint action which become at times disgraceful, and by a treachery which is often horrifying. We might, therefore, be forgiven if we should feel the temptation to dismiss the quarrels and the wars of such men as the battles of kites and crows. But although it would be unwise to do this, it is most necessary to bear in mind the real character of English history before the Norman conquest; and we must not hesitate, therefore, to point it out with the utmost clearness before we go further.

Throughout the whole of this time we are struck by the singular weakness, or rather absence, of the feeling now often described by the name of nationality; and this instability, or want of fixed character, in the people is reflected with scarcely a single exception in their leaders. If we are to take the story as it stands, it would be hard indeed to find one in whom weakness and vacillation of will failed to work dire mischief at some critical moment.



There is, however, little in this which should excite either surprise or wonder. The whole story, from the first Teutonic invasion of the country to the victory of the Norman Duke at Senlac, brings before us a series of fierce struggles with short intervals of precarious rest. From almost all of these conflicts some new man comes forth as the master. Change of lords became at length so frequent that the people submitted to it almost as a matter of course.

But if the signs of weakness are seen everywhere, the tokens of coming greatness are not wanting; and the main fact to be noted and remembered is this, that, for whatever reason, imperial Rome failed, and that the Teutonic invaders did not fail, to make a permanent impression on the country.

For those, however, who at the time looked on this country from without, the English conquest may well have seemed a disaster indeed. Not only was the old Roman civilisation and refinement, or whatever remained of it, swept away, but the Christianity of the Britons was utterly rooted out. The land was once more in the hands of heathens, whose lives exhibited not a little of the ferocity of mere savages. These heathen tribes thought very much of their own freedom; but they thought nothing of the freedom of others. If we are to believe the English Chronicle (which upsets many a fiction or fancy of later times), the Britons had

fought for their land not altogether ingloriously ; and the bravery of Natanleod (page 23), who fell on the field of battle at Charford in 508, may stand in place of the valour of King Arthur, whose twelve victories reflect only the twelve successful labours of Heracles (Hercules).

The name of Arthur brings before us the wonderful romance which repeats the story told in almost every epic poem of the Aryan world. But it is useless to look for grains of historical fact in the career of the prince who wields the sword brought to him by the fairy queen, and who only slumbers in Avallon,¹ awaiting, like Olger the Dane, the moment when he is to reappear in his ancient strength and majesty. We have, indeed, no reason or even excuse for accepting the stories of exploits or incidents which are unknown to those who have left us the earliest records of the time ; and even the English Chronicle, invaluable though it be, cannot be trusted everywhere in its chronology.

But although Arthur fades into the mists of cloudland with William of Cloudeslee in the old English ballad, and William Tell and many more, the fact that the Britons were not conquered at a stroke, and that they were not even always defeated, still remains. The Teutonic invaders seem to have started in their work of conquest with frantic rage ; but the first fury of onset soon yielded to the sobering thoughts of their personal interest. The de-

struction of all buildings would only leave them houseless ; the wholesale slaughter of the inhabitants would only deprive them of servants whose toil might bring them wealth. The buildings were spared and the people were kept alive ; but they were reserved for the doom of slavery. Their children became hereditary bondmen. The dragon's teeth were sown ; and from this horrid seed sprang, it would seem, the great curse of serfdom, which lay as a deadly incubus on the land for many a weary age.

¹ This is supposed to be the same place as Glastonbury, where the body of Arthur is said to have been discovered in the time of Henry II.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CONVERSION OF THE ENGLISH.

THE influence which might have deprived the evil of its sting was for the time crushed. The captives and the bondmen were Christians ; but the fierce conqueror, utterly untouched by the leaven of Roman civilisation, would only despise a religion which tended to quench in men the delight in strife and violence and selfishness. But the fact that this scorn was felt, and that the conversion of the conquerors was needed, brings out into the strongest light the contrast between the condition of Britain

and that of other provinces of the empire—between the results of Teutonic invasion here and the results of like inroads elsewhere.

On the mainland there was no such plunging back into heathenism, and the absorption of the invaders into the great Christian community was a steady process. In Britain the old faith was the faith of an enemy to be exterminated; and it was stamped out or banished with those who professed it. The need of converting the conquerors is of itself conclusive proof that they are not the same people with the multitudes whom they slaughtered or drove out as Welshmen.

As the years went on, the darkness of heathenism settled down in thicker gloom over the land, and the Britons, if we are to believe the story, took no trouble to dispel it. It may be true to say that greater zeal might have been more saint-like; and by way of excuse it might, on the other hand, be pleaded that heroic self-devotion is, to say the least, not common. But the true explanation is to be found in the fact that Christianity in any shape or form had no existence within the borders of any of the earliest Teutonic principalities. Free British Christians would be debarred from crossing them; and the influence exercised by bondmen and slaves is seldom large. For the English heathen the deliverance was to come not from tribes which they had dispossessed, but from

the Eternal City, where the Pope was practically taking the place of the Emperor.

The fire which was to burst out into healing light for England was kindled, it is said, in the heart of the priest Gregory, when in the slave-market of Rome he beheld some children, fair-haired, bright-eyed, and graceful in form, waiting to be sold. On his asking whence they came, he was told that they had been brought from Britain. Asking further, what their religion might be, he learnt that they were heathens, and he expressed his sorrow that creatures so lovely should be the prey of the prince of darkness. "But to what race do they belong?" asked the priest. "They are of the race of the Angles," was the answer. "Well are they so called," he replied, "for they are meet to become angels of God; and by God's grace they shall become such. But if they are Angles by birth, from what region do they come?" "From the kingdom of Deira," was the answer. Gregory was now fairly started on the series of puns which gave expression to his feelings of pity and love. "This is well," he cried, "for they shall be delivered *De ira Dei* (from the wrath of God), and shall be made His dear children. And how name you the king of this land?" "He is called Ælle," they said; and Gregory wound up his catechism with the fervent words, "Well, again, for the prophesy of this name also shall

be fulfilled, and the sound of Alleluia shall be heard in every portion of his realm."

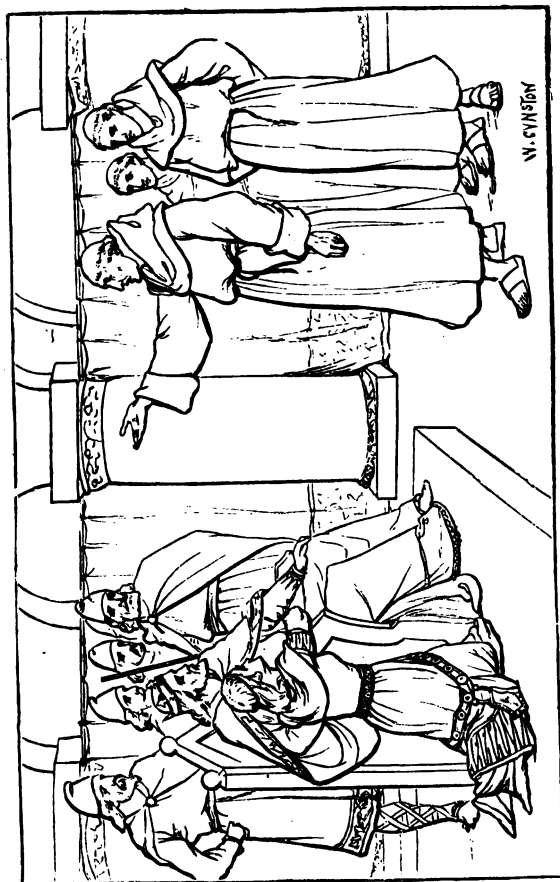
Eager to set out at once on his errand of mercy, Gregory, then a simple priest, hurried to the Pope, wrung from him a reluctant consent to the enterprise, and forthwith took his departure. He had journeyed for three days, when he was stopped by the Pope's messengers. The population of Rome had been almost roused to rebellion by grief for his loss, and he was straitly charged to return. Gregory was a monk, and the monk's first and last duty is obedience. He went back to the active life, which showed that none else was so worthy to fill the chair of St. Peter. But no sooner had he become the "Servant of the servants of God"¹ than his thoughts went back to the fair vision on which his eyes had rested in the slave-market. He could not leave his flock himself and depart to seek out new sheep elsewhere; but he could impose on others the task which he would more gladly have undertaken in his own person.

For this task his choice fell most wisely on the monk Augustine, who with some other monks set out with praiseworthy promptitude. As their distance from Rome became greater, the dangers of their pilgrimage assumed more formidable proportions, and a few days saw them again at the feet of Gregory the Great. To their prayer that he would release them

from this work, Gregory replied simply that to look back after putting hand to the plough was sin; that he would rejoice to go forth with them, if he could; but that, as he could not, he would give them letters to divers princes and great men, which might help to make their path more easy.

Augustine and his companions were no cowards. Their hearts had failed them only for a moment, and henceforth they knew no fear. Hastening on as speedily as they could, they soon found themselves in the Kentish land, of which Æthelberht (A.D. 560-616), the third Bretwalda, was the king. Like his countrymen, Æthelberht was a heathen; but he could scarcely be without some knowledge of Christianity, which was professed by his wife Bertha, daughter of Charibert, King of Paris, even if we leave out of sight the British bondmen who might be found in his dominions.

On the tidings that forty strangers, who had reached the Isle of Thanet, wished to talk with him on the subject of religion, Æthelberht sent to say that he was ready to hear what they might have to tell him. But dread of magic, we are told, determined him to receive them not under his roof, but under an oak tree. Here, with a silver cross borne before him and a banner bearing the likeness of the Redeemer, Augustine approached him and delivered the message with which he was charged. The



ST. AUGUSTINE PREACHING TO ÆTHELBERHT.

answer of Æthelberht was simple, reasonable, and generous. He could not, he said, abandon on a sudden his own religion for another with which he was unacquainted, but that, as the purpose of the strangers was clearly a kind one, they should not only be free to speak wherever they pleased and to make all the converts whom they could gain, but they should also be maintained at his cost.

Full of gladness, the monks resumed their journey to Canterbury, which they entered chanting the prayer, "We beseech Thee, O Lord, in Thy mercy, turn Thy anger and wrath from this city and from Thy holy house, for we are sinners. Alleluia." So with this word of glad thanksgiving was fulfilled the promise of Ælla's name, which fell from the lips of Gregory in the slave market at Rome.

This beautiful tale is related by Bæda, a perfectly honest historian, so far as his lights carried him. Bæda, commonly known as the Venerable Bede, spent his whole life in the monastery of Jarrow, where he died, A.D. 735, at the age of sixty-three. He compiled a history of the country from the earliest times to his own. As a historian, he was ready to believe any prodigies, portents, or miracles reported to him by others. There is, however, no reason to suppose that he recounted on his own authority anything of the truth of which he was not fully satisfied.

But with his trustworthiness in matters coming within the range of his own experience our confidence in him comes to an end. For the rest, his statements must be taken for what they may be worth ; and at the distance of more than seventy years from the time of Augustine's coming it is impossible to say how far the wonder-loving spirit of those who had any faith at all may have moulded the narrative of the conversion of England. But whatever be the historical value of the tale in its present form, the fact remains that the great work was undertaken at the bidding of the Pope, and that the man to whom it was intrusted became the first Archbishop of Canterbury.

¹ A title often used by the Popes in speaking of themselves, following the precept given in Matt. xx. 27.

CHAPTER VII.

AUGUSTINE AND THE BRITISH BISHOPS.

AUGUSTINE had not to wait long before Æthelberht, seeing the impression made on his subjects by the new teachers, professed himself a Christian. His baptism, A.D. 597, was speedily followed by the simultaneous submission of ten thousand of his subjects. But the charity of Augustine was not confined,

we are told, to the rescuing of the English alone from the darkness of heathenism.

This portion of his task he was doing, indeed, with great judiciousness. There was no expression of contempt or indignation on the part of the missionaries for the system which they avowed themselves determined to put down. The heathen temple became in each place, on the conversion of the inhabitants, the Christian church; and they were allowed to keep up all festal usages which were in themselves harmless. The questions put by Augustine to the Pope may show that he might have made serious mistakes, if left to himself; but from Gregory they drew forth answers which well deserve the attention of missionaries of any age. As the work went on, Augustine was directed to consecrate bishops for Rochester and London, while he was also invested with jurisdiction over all the bishops in Britain.

This act implied, of course, that the Roman bishop had authority over all Christian bishops, wherever they might be found, for the consent of the British bishops and clergy was not asked to the decree by which Gregory made Augustine metropolitan of England, and by which he partitioned the whole country into two provinces each with twelve sees. But this assumption of authority was becoming constantly more necessary, if the claims urged by the popes were to be maintained. The unity

of the Church, it was asserted, was a visible unity under a visible head ; and the Pope insisted that this visible head could be no other than himself, as the Vicar of Jesus Christ and the successor of St. Peter, the prince of the Apostles.

These claims the British bishops were not disposed to admit. They were urged by a man who was now a bishop over English Christians ; and the Britons had not yet brought themselves to look on their conquerors, even if converted, with feelings of special kindliness. Nor were the demands made by Augustine likely to remove or lessen their repugnance.

There was clearly, they thought, a disposition to interfere in matters which they held themselves to be perfectly justified in regulating in their own way. The British clergy had a form of tonsure and a method of calculating Easter different from the Roman. They were required to give up both as conditions necessary for the preservation of Catholic unity. On their refusal of this demand, Augustine obtained their assent, it is said, to the decision of the question by miracle. He healed a blind man, whose sight the British bishops had been unable to restore ; but the latter, while they acknowledged that the miracle showed him to be a man of God, declined to allow that on this account they were bound to admit his jurisdiction.

A second meeting was arranged, to be held at a place known afterwards as Augustine's Oak, in Worcestershire. But before they attended it the British bishops took counsel with a holy hermit, who advised them to be guided by a moral test, and to follow Augustine, if he were a man of God. When they asked how they were to ascertain this, the hermit replied that all servants of God were meek and lowly, and that if Augustine showed himself haughty and ungente, they might safely reject his claims.

This answer still left them perplexed ; but on being questioned again the hermit told them that they might settle the matter by allowing Augustine to reach the place of meeting first. If he should rise on their coming, they might regard him as meek and humble ; if he should remain sitting, they would have sufficient proof of his arrogance. Augustine unluckily did not rise at their approach ; and when the British bishops bluntly refused to acknowledge his jurisdiction, he burst, it is said, into loud expressions of indignation at their want of Christian love in making no efforts to convert the English, and warned them that their neglect of duty would assuredly bring down on them the vengeance of God.

A few years later, A.D. 607, so the story runs, the English attacked the Britons at Chester, Caerleon, the city of the legions. The monks of the neighbouring monastery of Bangor

stood by to aid their countrymen by their prayers. On learning the reason of their presence, the English king declared that prayers might be a more potent weapon against him than spears, and ordered his soldiers, before they attacked anyone else, to cut them down. This massacre Bæda regarded as the fulfilment of Augustine's warning; others said that it could not have been instigated by Augustine, as he had died some years before. But if it be true, as some have urged, that the quarrel arose entirely on points of discipline, and in no way related to differences of belief, we have only more mournful evidence of the fierceness with which both sides could maintain a groundless controversy.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PROGRESS OF CHRISTIANITY IN NORTHUMBRIA.

THE death of Æthelberht, A.D. 616, seemed to show that the fabric raised by Augustine rested on no solid foundations. His son, Eadbald, married his stepmother; and when Laurentius, who was now archbishop, pointed out the sinfulness of the union, Eadbald renounced Christianity altogether. The king of the East Saxons fol-

lowed his example. The bishops of London and Rochester fled across the sea. Laurentius feared that he also might be compelled to fly; but appearing one morning before the king, he showed him his back seamed with weals and scars. To the question of the king, who asked who had dared to treat him thus, he said that the scourging had been inflicted by St. Peter as a punishment for his thought of abandoning the mission intrusted to him. The king took the lesson to heart, put away his wife, and again submitted himself and his people to the Church.

Thus was the work fairly begun which restored the island of Britain to the great community of European Christendom; but the island was restored to it, not as a Roman province, but strictly as a Teutonic land. The dioceses into which the country was divided were for the most part co-extensive with the several kingdoms or principalities established by the Teutonic invaders, while the dioceses of Gaul, for instance, represented the jurisdiction of Roman cities, with which the conquering Franks had not interfered.

This fact has an important bearing on the subsequent course of English history. The establishment of a Christian hierarchy supplied a foundation for what may be called a national union, a foundation which had not been supplied by the political constitutions of the Teu-

tonic kingdoms in the island. It has been well said that the Archbishop of Canterbury held a more ancient office than the English king, and that in him the English had a common primate and a common synod long before they had a common king and a common assembly.

Nor was this the only political result of the religious change. Thus far the English kings or princes had reigned by virtue of their descent from Woden. Christianity knew nothing of such a plea, and the king was now consecrated to his office by crowning and anointing. But this very act implied that his office was bestowed according to law, and that what the law gave it might take away. The power of the English kings was thus declared emphatically to be a trust conferred by the people for the common good of all, and for the ministering of true judgment between man and man.

But it was not in Kent or among the East Saxons only that the work of conversion went on with strangely chequered fortunes. More than all other princes of the time, Edwin, son of Ælla, the founder of the kingdom of Deira, the land to the north of the Humber, could look back upon marvellous experiences of danger and disaster. On his father's death, A.D. 588, his throne had been seized by Æthel-frith, the slaughterer of the Bangor monks at Caerleon. The tragedy there brought about

was caused, it seems, by the refusal of the chief of North Wales to surrender the young Edwin, who on the defeat of his friend was compelled to seek a refuge elsewhere.

For a time he was sheltered by Redwald, king of East Anglia ; but the bribes of Æthel-frith shook Redwald's faith, and a friend, warning Edwin of the danger of treachery, bade him fly. Worn out with anxiety, Edwin refused to stir, and being left alone, sat brooding over his sorrows, until at the dead of night he heard a voice asking him why he alone remained awake. When he replied that his mode of spending the night could concern no one but himself, the stranger, telling him that he knew the cause of his grief, asked him what he would give to be assured of the fidelity of Redwald. Edwin answered that he would give anything in his power, and expressed still deeper gratitude when the stranger assured him that he should not only escape his present danger, but should be more powerful than any of the kings who had gone before him. One question more the stranger asked. "If I can do all this, and if, more than this, I can show you the way of salvation which shall bring you to an endless life in heaven, will you obey my counsel and do as I would have you?" On receiving the promise, the stranger laid his hand on Edwin's head, and bade him remember the sign.

- From that moment things went well with Edwin. Redwald, refusing to give him up, met the army of Æthelfrith on the field of Retford, A.D. 617. Æthelfrith was slain ; but there too fell the son of Redwald, and Edwin became his successor. As his wife he chose a daughter of Æthelberht, king of Kent, who at first objected to the marriage on the ground that Edwin was a heathen. He yielded at length on Edwin's assurance that she should be allowed the free exercise of her religion ; and the bride of the East Anglian king appeared before him under the guardianship of Paulinus, who had been consecrated as first bishop of the arch-diocese of York.

With Edwin himself Paulinus could achieve nothing. His life was attempted in his house at Aldby, near Stamford Bridge, by an assassin sent, it is said, by the king of Wessex ; but the blow of the dagger, which was thought to be poisoned, was diverted by the son of one of his thanes, who sacrificed himself for his master's safety. The birth of his first child followed on the next day ; but his joy at this event could draw from him nothing more than a promise that he would renounce his idols if he should be victorious over the chief who had employed a murderer to do his will. The victory was gained ; but Edwin still remained obdurate, until, as the story goes, Paulinus one day approached him, and solemnly laid his hand

upon his head, bidding him remember the warning of the vision.

The tale implies that the knowledge of this vision had been divinely imparted to Paulinus ; but this is not the only point on which the traditions relating to Edwin tremble on the very verge of romance. All that can be said is that in some way or other Edwin's resistance was overcome ; and a great council was summoned to decide the question of the national religion.

In this assemblage, the first speaker, we are told, was the chief priest Coifi, who declared that the new teaching should at least be carefully considered, inasmuch as it was abundantly evident that the old religion possessed no virtue whatever. Had it been worth anything, the favours of the gods would have been showered down lavishly on himself, their most devoted worshipper, whereas the portion which had fallen to his lot was scant indeed. If the new doctrines should appear more efficacious, they should, he urged, be adopted without further debate.

The second speaker, it is said, compared the life of man to the flight of a bird across a lighted hall in winter time. It came out of darkness ; it was cheered for the moment by the light of the blazing fire ; and it vanished into darkness again. If the new teaching could throw any light on this abyss of mystery, it

must be better than a religion which had nothing to say about it.

Paulinus was now called on to set forth the new faith ; and, having heard him to the end, Coifi candidly confessed that the truth contained in it could confer on them the gifts of life, of salvation, and of eternal happiness, and that they would do well therefore to abandon a religion from which they all, and he more especially, had derived no advantage whatever.

It became needful now to mark the great change by the demolition of the heathen idols and their altars ; and when the king asked who would venture on so perilous a task, Coifi replied that no one could undertake it more fitly than himself, who had unwittingly maintained a system proved to be utterly false. All that he asked was that he should be provided with arms, which a priest was not allowed to carry, and with a horse, which he was forbidden to mount. The folk stared as at a madman, while the priest, spear in hand, rode towards the temple and there hurled his lance into the idol. No harm followed, and Coifi, less tolerant than Pope Gregory, ordered the temple with its contents to be consumed by fire. So ended the worship of the old deities at Godmundingham, now known as Goodmanham, on the banks of the Derwent, in the wapentake¹ of Harthill.

¹ The territorial division of the wapentake is still retained in Yorkshire. It stands in the place of the division into hundreds.

CHAPTER IX.

ECCLESIASTICAL CONTROVERSIES OF THE
SEVENTH CENTURY.

FOR a time the fabric raised by Paulinus was, like that of Augustine, doomed to fall. Edwin, great and prosperous, incurred the hatred of the heathen Penda, the Mercian king, who entered into an alliance with the Christian Ceadwalla, the British chief of Gwyneth, or North Wales. Fighting with these princes, he fell (A.D. 633) in the great battle of Hatfield Chase, near Doncaster; and the two Northumbrian kings, to show that they had nothing to do with him, abjured Christianity.

Both these chiefs were slain fighting, and their successor Oswald, who again set up the cross, fell in battle, at Maserfield, A.D. 642, against the Mercian Penda, leaving behind him the memory of a saint and martyr. More wars and more slaughterings followed, until Penda in his turn was slain in the great fight of Winwedfield on the banks of the Aire, near Leeds, A.D. 655. His conqueror, Oswio, now became the most powerful prince in the island, and Christianity worked its way slowly amongst his subjects.

Its progress was broken by controversies on matters of mere discipline, which were treated as if they were vital truths. The Scottish or

British party and the Roman party appealed each to the authority of great and saintly names.

At the Synod of Whitby, A.D. 664, Wilfrid, afterwards archbishop of York, asked whether his opponent Colman would dare to oppose the authority of Columba to that of St. Peter, to whom were intrusted the keys of heaven. Here the king turned sharply on Colman, and asked him whether he allowed that St. Peter held the keys of the heavenly kingdom. "Beyond doubt," was the answer. "Then," replied the king, "I shall hold to Peter, lest, when I offer myself at the gates of heaven, he should shut them against me;" and so the debate was ended.

But, in truth, there was nothing wonderful in the devotion which the English clergy and laity displayed to the occupants of the see of Rome. Roman missionaries had first preached the good tidings of the Divine Love in the kingdom of Æthelberht. From that centre had spread, however slowly and fitfully, the softening influences which were moulding the seething mass of a savage heathenism. To Rome went almost all who sought admission to the priesthood; and there they beheld the mighty works of past days, and a magnificence of art which filled them with amazement and awe. What they saw was, indeed, a mere wreck,—fragments attesting the glories of a Rome which

was vanishing away ; but these fragments exhibited a beauty and a majesty, of which in their own land they could never have even dreamed.

It was no wonder then that they who knelt to receive the blessing of the successor of St. Peter should feel for him a loyalty ready to face all perils in his service ; and among the most loyal and devoted of these was Wilfrid, bishop first of Lindisfarne, now called Holy Island, and afterwards of York.

Wilfrid's life was one of strange changes. Having gone to Compiègne to receive consecration, he remained in Gaul three years. On his return he narrowly escaped with his life in a fierce struggle with the merciless wreckers of the Sussex coast, and finding his see filled by the Scottish monk Ceadda (Chad), withdrew quietly to his monastery at Ripon. Here he built a church, which left on the minds of the English an impression of surpassing grandeur, while his friend Benedict Biscop was enriching his church at Wearmouth with books and paintings, the most precious which could be obtained in Rome.

The controversies of these early ages were confined virtually to questions of authority and jurisdiction. Wilfrid's great quarrel was to be not with Scottish monks or priests, but with the Greek Theodore of Tarsus, the archbishop of Canterbury, against whose division of the

see of York he protested. Appealing to the Pope, he departed. A storm cast his ship on the coast of Friesland, where he remained a year, toiling unweariedly for the conversion of a people who had tarried in the old home of the English. Finding his way at length to Rome, he obtained from the Pope a decree reinstating him in his bishopric ; but he went back only to be shut up in a prison.

Set free at length, he found a refuge in Sussex among the people who had all but taken his life when the storm threw him on their coast years ago ; and in their conversion he found the noblest revenge. On his death-bed the Archbishop Theodore, whom a singular fortune had brought from the birthplace of St. Paul to the gloomier land of the English, expressed his sorrow for the wrong done to Wilfrid, who, he now said, had been unjustly deposed. Wilfrid's restoration broke only for a moment the long series of disputes in which his whole life was to be entangled. It is a strange spectacle of disquietude and unrest ; but never perhaps was there a man of whom it might with greater truth be said that the evil which he had done died with him, while the good lived on.

Wherever he had worked, Wilfrid's success as a missionary was marvellous ; and much as we may be repelled by the gross and sometimes almost fiendish savagery of English life in his

day, we cannot in fairness put out of sight the solid results achieved by the Christian teachers. The life of the historian Bæda (A.D. 672-735) alone is a striking commentary on their labours. Almost before the end of threescore and ten years from the landing of Augustine on Kentish soil, we have a man in a Northumbrian monastery making himself master of the whole range of learning, as it was then available, in science, in history, and in theology. Bæda never went to Rome, and scarcely ever left his convent. It was possible, therefore, for a man even in his day to live in peace ; but he could scarcely hope to do so except in a monastery.

In this fact we have an explanation of the great characteristic of the time. While the world without presented a scene of ceaseless turmoil, they who would attain repose must shut the world out and find a refuge under the shadow of the Church. Beneath this shelter was growing such a culture as the age was capable of receiving ; and while Bæda, not altogether happily perhaps, was learning to write Latin prose and poetry as well as any wrote either in Rome itself, Cædmon was using his native English speech to tell the story of Creation in strains which, far more than the fierce lays which celebrated the battle of Konigsburg or the exploits of Beowulf,¹ should help to shape the English of the future.

Time was, indeed, wreaking its revenge in a

Hughes's Hist. V.

strange fashion. The English on their coming had swept away the relics of the Roman civilisation which had at least covered the land superficially ; and now they were receiving the religion, the art, and the culture of Rome so thoroughly that when, not very much later, the Danes began their inroads, these terrible warriors found scarcely a trace of the old heathenism remaining in tribes with whom they were themselves most closely akin.

But the thoroughness with which the English accepted the faith and practice of Catholic Christendom involved no slavish dependence. They had never bowed to the yoke of the Roman Emperor ; and in spite of all feelings of gratitude and devotion, they refused to submit themselves unreservedly to the Roman pontiff. To a certain extent they retained their mother tongue as the language of the Church ; and the habit of translating portions of the Old and New Testaments led both clergy and laity (consciously or unconsciously) to exercise their judgment on what they translated and what they read. Latin terms were but sparingly adopted to denote matters of belief. For *Salvation* and the *Saviour* they spoke of *Health* and the *Healer*, while *hanging* and the *gallows* took the place of the *cross* and the *crucifixion*.

Even the abuses most complained of by the staunchest partisans of Rome (as, for instance,

the lax ideas said to be entertained by the English as to the duties of monastic or of ecclesiastical life) furnish evidence of a spirit which was not disposed to surrender itself unconditionally to the dictates of a foreign authority. We shall see in the case of Dunstan that clergy and laity were alike disposed to favour those theories of which at the Reformation the nation expressed its emphatic approval.

¹ The word *Beowulf* means the wolf-tamer. The date at which the epic poem which relates his exploits was composed is uncertain. Only one manuscript of it exists, and this belongs to the tenth century.

CHAPTER X.

POLITICAL GROWTH OF ENGLAND.

WHILE Christianity was thus slowly and uncertainly working its way, the relative positions of the multitude of English kingdoms or principalities were changing much after the same sort. The greater number were, of necessity, swallowed up altogether. Of the rest, some became subordinate to those of other chiefs, or retained a nominal existence under the rule of some kinsman of the overlord. A few remained as independent powers, until at length one became pre-eminent and, to some extent, supreme.

The sovereigns of these greater states set

forth their authority under the highest sounding titles, some of which imply a theory of nothing less than imperial power. So sedulously is this inflated language employed, that we are apt to forget how short the time was during which such order as they established was maintained, and to how great an extent the picture drawn is a work of imagination.

It is really of little use to speak of Egbert, the king of Wessex, as lord of all the kingdoms of England, and of his successors a hundred years later as doing his work over again, and of a still later king as giving to it a finishing stroke by subduing a region over which Egbert professed himself to be supreme. We are scarcely justified in treating seriously the scenes in which a Scottish monarch is exhibited commending his realm to an English king, when after a few years we find this English kingdom swept away by an alien dynasty set up by barbarian invaders.

The truth is, we have here the rise and fall of petty principalities, the growth of a few more powerful and considerable states, and the temporary aggrandisement of one. But at no time before the Norman conquest have we the political union of a nation, or anything even approaching to it, while the story in some parts is so full of inconsistencies, contradictions, and impossibilities as to lose almost all title to our belief.

For a time it seemed as though the lordship of the whole island must fall to the lot of the kings of Northumbria or Mercia. The prophecy of Edwin's vision (p. 45) had been fully accomplished ; but in spite of this the power of the Mercian king assumed proportions still more imposing, when, if the fact be as it is stated, he was addressed as the mightiest potentate of Western Christendom by Charles the Great, commonly known as Charlemagne, the sovereign of the old empire in which the Roman and the Teuton had now equally a part. In spite of this, again, the supremacy, real or imaginary, was to pass to the son of a Kentish king, who after a severe discipline in the school of adversity ascended the throne of Cerdic.

The election of Egbert falls in the same year in which Charles the Great was chosen and crowned emperor of the Romans. It was the last year of the eighth century. The power of the kings of Wessex had, thus far, advanced slowly enough. Amongst them had been numbered Ceadwalla (A.D. 685-688), the friend of Wilfrid of York, who probably was imbued by Wilfrid with that devotion to all things Roman, which impelled him at length to seek for baptism at the hands of the Roman pontiff himself. By the Pope accordingly Ceadwalla was baptized ; but before the time came for laying aside his chrisom (or baptismal) robe, he was taken away by a sudden illness, and an inscrip-

tion in St. Peter's Church preserved the memory of the West Saxon king who had ended his earthly pilgrimage in the Eternal City.

During the long reign of his successor Ine, (A.D. 688-726), the West Saxon kingdom made great progress in law, order, and government. But while Ine was illustrious both as a lawgiver and as a warrior, he was still more anxious for the religious welfare of his people, and for the peace which would be best secured, as he thought, by the multiplication of religious houses. His own great foundation is that of the monastery of Glastonbury, with which the name of Dunstan was so closely associated.

But although the founding or the enrichment of monasteries might possibly have contented himself, it could not satisfy his wife. He must be made to follow the example of Ceadwalla; and the mode by which she carried out her scheme was to hurry him away from his palace after a magnificent banquet, and to bring him back as suddenly to see rooms which by her order had been filled with filth, and in which sows wallowed where nobles had but a few hours before been feasting. "So passes away," she said, "the glory of the world; and to this loathsome state must the body even of the greatest king be brought in the grave. Care then for the spirit only, and seek its health in the city to whose bishop we owe our knowledge of the Christian faith."

Ine, beyond doubt, went to Rome, and like

Ceadwalla he died there ; but mere weariness of active life may after a reign of thirty-seven years have brought him thither as effectually as the exhortations of his wife. He is said to have lived there in the garb of a common labourer, wishing to be utterly unknown. He is said also to have founded the English college there ; and this would have made him known to all the Roman populace. We may choose either of these tales or reject both ; but we cannot receive both.

A fact far more important than any incidents belonging to the personal life of Ine is established by the language of many of his laws. The change which distinguishes his legislation from the merciless rule by which the Britons were treated in the days of the first Teutonic inroads is, indeed, most marked. It is a change which is due wholly to the influence of Christianity.

The first English invaders were fierce heathen ; and as they slew or drove out their enemies, they had no need to legislate about them. Ine and the other kings of Wessex had not lost the desire to extend their dominions ; but they professed a faith which checked their lust for slaughter, and we now find the Welsh in their land admitted to the protection of the law, although their inferiority to their conquerors is still most distinctly defined. Their lives are rated at a lower value than are those of the English freemen, and the oath of an Englishman will out-

weigh the oaths of many Welshmen. By the time of Alfred things are changed again. These humiliating distinctions have vanished. His Welsh subjects have been merged and lost in the great body of the English folk.

Under Egbert (A.D. 800—836), who calls himself king of the English, the English dominion was rapidly extended westwards. Happily the object of the conqueror was, as the laws of Ine show, no longer what it had been in the days of Hengist and of Cerdic. His purpose was not to slay but to subdue; and although his sway was carried to the Land's End, the old inhabitants were neither swept away nor even reduced to slavery. But as the English pressed on from the east, the language of the Britons receded slowly to the west, a larger proportion of the conquered tribes learning in each generation the speech of their conquerors. This was inevitable; but the British language died out in Cornwall only in the last century, in the person of Dolly Pentraeth.

CHAPTER XI.

FIRST INROADS OF THE DANES.

FOR nineteen years Egbert's reign was rendered brilliant by an almost unbroken series of successes. But the bright sky was then darkened by clouds ominous of dire disaster. The

danger was precisely similar to that which had led the Romans to appoint a Count of the Saxon Shore. Marauders were again attacking the land, marauders seemingly more fierce and altogether more cruel and heartless than those which found their way hither under Hengist, or Ælle, or Cerdic. To a large extent the same causes which had rendered the Teutonic invasions so dreadful in the days of Vortigern added to the terrors and miseries caused by the Danish inroads in the days of Egbert and his successors.

The Danes were, in fact, precisely what the English, Jutes, and Saxons had been some three centuries before. They were still, as thoroughly as ever these had been, free from the influence of the Roman heaven which worked everywhere surely and irresistibly within the borders of the empire. They knew nothing of the religion of Rome, and they felt only savage hatred and contempt for those whom they regarded as enervated by its effects.

The Britons had been really weakened by a civilization which for them was artificial; and the English, we can scarcely doubt, had in their turn become less fitted to cope with enemies so brutal, precisely in the measure in which they were animated by the spirit of Latin Christianity. The inmates of monastic houses lived in a religious atmosphere which rendered the very thought of war distasteful and horrible

to them ; and it was precisely to the religious houses that the fierce heathen plunderers were irresistibly attracted.

These foundations were already centres of wealth in the midst of a people struggling with a poor soil and a hard climate. Here were brought together treasures such as could not be seen elsewhere, vessels of the sanctuary blazing with jewels, altars draped with hangings stiff with gold embroidery, robes more magnificent than those of kings, books the out-sides of which, studded with masses of precious metal or gems, had a value for thieves who regarded the accomplishment of reading as the lowest of degradations for a freeman.

All this wealth, all these splendid churches, which might so well be used as banqueting halls for high carousing and deep drinking, were, with all their stores of food and wine, to be had almost without an effort. In none of these houses did they encounter any obstinate resistance ; in many not a blow was struck by the monks in self-defence. The vengeance of the people was in most instances baffled by the rapidity of their movements. The rovers who swooped down on the coast at break of day would be far away at sea again before the sun was high in the heaven, leaving behind them a heap of smoking ruins and the mangled bodies of monks or nuns whose dying agonies had furnished them with excellent amusement.

These inroads had begun before the reign of Egbert ; and there is no doubt that his power seriously checked, although it might not altogether repress, them. His danger was especially great when the Britons of Cornwall took part with the marauders ; but Egbert defeated both in the battle of Hingston, his last great exploit (A.D. 836).

During the reign of his son Æthelwulf, the father of Alfred the Great, the character of the Danish inroads underwent a change. The rovers landed not in troops, but in armies ; and the wintering of one of these armies in Thanet, A.D. 851, struck terror into the people, being, as they took it and as it really was, a sign that the Danes intended to settle in the land. This intention declared itself more and more as time went on ; but many years were yet to pass before the struggle was to assume the guise of a conflict between the Danish and the English kings for the sovereignty of the country.

The confusion caused by these devastations was not, however, so great as to prevent Æthelwulf from undertaking a pilgrimage to Rome. His wife was dead, and he took with him his son Alfred, who had already visited the Eternal City under the care of Swithun, bishop of Winchester. On his return he married Judith, the daughter of the French king, Charles the Bald, a girl only twelve or thirteen years of age. The remaining two years of his life he spent

rather as a vassal of his son Æthelbald than as an independent king. On his father's death Æthelbald married Judith; but so great was the outcry raised in consequence, that he agreed to a separation. Judith, returning to her father's court, became the wife of Baldwin, afterwards Earl of Flanders; and from their union descended Matilda, wife of William the Conqueror.

On the death of Æthelbald (860), his brother Æthelberht, who was already king of Kent, Essex, Sussex, and Surrey, claimed, and was elected to, the kingdom of Wessex. He reigned but five years; and, seemingly, before he died the Northmen had sacked the city of Winchester.

In the equally short reign of his brother Æthelred, who succeeded him, the Danes glutted their beastly and fiendish cruelty in their onslaughts on the monasteries of Croyland, Medeshampstede (Peterborough), and Ely. To behead abbots on the steps of the altars, to deluge the sanctuary with the blood of children, to inflict the foulest wrongs on helpless women, was for these loathsome wretches a pleasant pastime. On this awful tragedy the English princes looked, it would seem, with an astonishing indifference; nor were they roused to more vigorous action when the East Anglian king, Edmund, having fallen into Danish hands, was bound naked to a tree, scourged with whips,

pierced with a multitude of arrows, and then beheaded (A.D. 870). His people revered him as a martyr, and a great church rose over his tomb at St. Edmund's Bury; but of any advance towards anything like a national union there is not a trace.

The country was fallen on dark days indeed. Æthelred received a mortal wound at the battle of Basing, and his brother, the great Alfred, was elected king in his stead by the unanimous choice of the Witan of Wessex (A.D. 871).





KING ALFRED.

CHAPTER XII.

THE REIGN AND WORK OF ALFRED.

A.D. 871-901.

THE reign of Alfred was, in truth, to be a going through fire and water, until he should be brought out into the wealthy place. No man, probably, ever strove more earnestly to do his duty, or applied himself to his task with a more vigorous and determined will. His steadfast energy was fully rewarded, not indeed by the expulsion of the Danes altogether from the land, but by a moral conquest which so far subdued these brutal savages as to waken even in them something like human and kindly feeling. It was owing to him alone that, when

Danish kings ruled in England, their sway did not prove an intolerable curse, and that Christianity was enabled to exercise an influence which made Cnut (Canute) a not altogether unworthy successor of Alfred himself.

Of this great and good man we have a picture, undoubtedly faithful in the main, drawn by his biographer Asser. The story is not without its difficulties. At twelve years of age or more, Asser tells us, the boy was illiterate—in other words, he could not read—and the cause which he assigns for this ignorance is the unworthy neglect of his parents and nurses. We may ask, not what his parents and nurses were about, but what Swithun, the Bishop of Winchester, was thinking of or doing, while he had charge of the child on his first visit to Rome; or how it was that the Pope, who anointed him, asked no question and dropped no hints about his education.

That he was a singularly bright and winning child, and one in whom the sense of duty was early and deeply quickened, there can be no question; but we are again perplexed, when we come to the pretty story which tells us that his mother, showing him and his brother one day a book of poetry, said that he who should soonest read it should have it as his own. Charmed with the illuminated letters of the manuscript, he asked if she really meant what she said; and on being assured of this he

quickly acquired the power of reading, and gained the prize.

But his mother had died when he was only six years old. His father remained unmarried six years, and then married Judith, a girl of twelve. Alfred and Judith were thus precisely, or within a few months, of the same age ; and it is to the last degree unlikely, even if her own education were more advanced than his (which again is not likely), that she should take this maternal interest in a boy as old as herself.

The truth is that, if we are to accept all Asser's statements, it is hard to say what good results had been achieved by his two visits to Rome. Even after he had learnt to read and made himself acquainted with the ritual and devotions of the Church, Asser adds, with a mournful expression of regret, that "he could not gratify his ardent desire to learn the liberal arts, because, as he said, there were no good teachers at that time in all the kingdom of the West Saxons." Yet in Rome he had seen the highest art which the world could display, in music, in painting, in sculpture, as well as in books and in the furniture and adornment of churches. He had spent a year there when he was eleven or twelve years old, and he had enjoyed all the advantages which the highest station and the company of the most learned and the most illustrious men could assure to him.

It is not easy to get rid of the suspicion that Asser was speaking thus from the desire, of which he was scarcely conscious, to exhibit in sharp contrast the actual performances of Alfred in his later years with the difficulties which he had to encounter at starting. If we take his words literally, it is clearly impossible that one of his greatest hindrances arose from the fact that "when he was young and had the capacity for learning he could not find teachers." That to the last he had "an insatiable desire for knowledge" we may be sure; and it was the special characteristic of Alfred that by knowledge he meant the real knowledge which can stand every test of cross-examination, and not the pretence of knowledge, by which most men cheat themselves, to their grievous hurt or to their ruin.

Such was the man who was called to a throne at a time when the land was being overrun by troops or hordes of the most ferocious plunderers. He had to look on the miseries of others which he could not relieve, and he had to bear up, as best he could, under the tortures of a mysterious bodily malady which oppressed him, as Asser tells us, incessantly from the twentieth to the forty-fourth year of his life.

Asser's account, which, to say the least, is strangely confused and indistinct, seems to say that Alfred was from his infancy afflicted with

some dire internal disorder, of a kind so exquisitely painful as to prompt the prayer that God in His mercy would exchange its torments for some other lighter disease, if only this lighter disease should not show itself openly in the body, and so render him an object of contempt and less able to benefit mankind.

This prayer, offered up at a wayside shrine, was, Alfred felt, immediately answered. The disease was gone entirely, he was in sound health. But sound health, he feared, might wean his heart from God, and therefore he prayed yet again that "he might be strengthened for his work by some infirmity such as he might bear, but not such as would render him imbecile in his worldly duties," and accordingly he was on his marriage assailed by this new disorder, which clung to him as a thorn in the flesh for nearly a quarter of a century. It is more likely that the supposed disappearance of the first disease was only a respite, than that he was afflicted by two chronic disorders of different sorts.

To the depression which comes of bodily pain were added anxieties peculiarly oppressive to one who saw how much was needed for the humanising of his people, even if no enemy were in the land. They were grossly ignorant; their manners were coarse and debased, and their vices were brutal and degrading. He ought to have been at work, founding schools for their

education, and doing what might be necessary for the repression of crime ; but instead of this his thoughts were diverted to difficulties still more pressing and terrible.

Danish savages were ravaging the country, and had plainly no intention of leaving it. His own men fought bravely, but they were altogether overmatched in numbers, and he found himself driven to use money as an instrument of deliverance. The Danes, having wintered in London, advanced into the Mercian kingdom (A.D. 874), and the Mercian chief Burhred, worn down by misery, abandoned his realm and reached Rome only to die of a broken heart. In his place the marauders put Ceolwulf, a Mercian thane, who pledged himself to pay the tribute, and whom they put to death when he could squeeze nothing more out of his wretched subjects. So was brought to an ignominious end the long line of Mercian kings.

CHAPTER XIII.

ALFRED AND THE DANES.

THE heart of the island was now in the grip of the Danes, and they could arrange their plans for future depredations at their leisure. One body wintered with their fleet in the Tyne, and in the spring (A.D. 875) set about their

tasks of robbery and murder. The abbey of Lindisfarne was burnt to the ground ; but the monks managed to escape to the mountains. By self-inflicted wounds the nuns of Coldingham repelled violence of one kind only to fall victims to the devouring flames.

But nothing is gained by going through the long catalogue of sickening horrors. In every quarter the heavens seemed to be laden with gloom. The Danish Guthrum had seized the castle and monastery of Wareham, and made it his stronghold, knowing the weakness of the English as besiegers. Alfred offered to buy out his enemies, and on receiving their promise demanded hostages, which he was allowed to choose from the noblest of the chiefs. He bound them further by the strongest oaths. The oaths were broken ; the hostages were left to their fate ; and the Danes, moving by forced marches, took possession of Exeter (A.D. 876).

The English, it would seem, had long forgotten that their fathers were as much at home on the sea as on the land. Alfred felt that, if he was to cope with the enemy, he must face them on the waters as well as on the battle-field ; but even when he had fitted out a few ships, he found himself obliged to man them with foreign mercenaries. Trusting himself to these men, he encountered seven Danish ships, captured one, and put the rest to flight. The success justified further efforts. More ships

were built ; his people no longer shrank from serving in them ; and it seemed as though they would be well rewarded. The Danish cavalry marched to Exeter ; their infantry embarked on board their fleet, and were dashed on the coast by a storm which destroyed half their vessels. Guthrum was ready again to swear oaths, and to give hostages ; and this time he quitted Wessex for Mercia (A.D. 877).

A few months later (A.D. 878) Alfred was a fugitive, skulking in the morasses of Somersetshire. This sudden turn in his fortunes had been brought about by a change in the tactics of Guthrum. Thus far, after the toil of the summer campaign, the Danes had given the winter to idleness and sloth. Guthrum now ordered all his people to meet at a given place on the first day of the year ; and within a week they were masters of Chippenham.

Alfred, who was sojourning here, all but fell into their hands. At first he thought of rushing desperately into the thick of his enemies ; but listening to the sober counsels of friends, who besought him to reserve himself for better times, he made his way to some marsh land between the converging streams of the Parret and the Tone, afterwards known as Æthelingey (Athelney), the Prince's Island.

Here for a time he was as completely lost to his subjects as if he had been dead. Fancy busied itself afterwards in devising incidents for

this season of dire adversity; and the story grew up that he found shelter in the hut of a cow-herd, whose wife left him one day with a charge to see that the cakes baking on the hearth were not burnt. Alfred's thoughts wandered elsewhere; the bread was scorched; and the poor woman, returning to find her labour lost, told him that he was but a lazy churl, lacking spirit even to attend to the preparation of food which he would be glad enough to eat when made ready for him by another.

Alfred, it is said, did not tell her what his life's work really was; but as the weeks went by, his more zealous adherents learnt his hiding-place and began to gather round him. The men of Somerset were still faithful to the king who had not spared himself in their defence, and in his humiliation they forgot the harshness and severity by which, in the early part of his reign, he is said to have chilled and almost quenched the affection of his people.

Cast down, he was not dismayed. He was content to move slowly and warily. As he slept he was cheered, we are told, by a vision of St. Cuthbert, who assured him that he should soon be enabled to smite his enemies and to resume the work of good government over his subjects. In the day time he succeeded with his followers in cutting off straggling parties of the Danes; and once, in the guise of a harper, he went boldly, it is said, into the Danish

camp, and there, while he delighted them with his music, marked the laxity of their discipline and the points at which a sudden surprise would most probably achieve success. Gaining courage after a while, he joined his marshy hiding-place to the mainland by a bridge, which he protected by a fort.

Other signs were not wanting which seemed to show that the tide had turned. The sons of the fierce Viking Ragnar Lodbrog, whom the vipers had, according to the story, stung to death in the dungeons of the Northumbrian Ælle, were ravaging the northern coasts of Devon (A.D. 878). The English ealdorman took refuge in the castle of Kynwith, and the Danish leaders sat down at the base of the hill, till thirst should compel his surrender. As day broke, the ealdorman came down from his intrenchments, burst into the Danish camp, slew their generals, and seized their standard or flag of the Raven. This mysterious ensign, woven, we are told, in a single night by the daughters of Ragnar, and endowed with the magic power of foretelling the issue of a fight by the flapping of its wings, was laid at the feet of Alfred, who was himself encouraged by seeing the effect which the possession of this banner had upon the minds of his followers.

The tidings that their king was not dead were now spreading quickly throughout the land; and Alfred soon found himself at the

head of a force with which he needed not to fear to take the field. Pitching his camp on the heights of Ethandune (not far from Westbury, in Wiltshire), he drew up his army in order of battle and awaited the attack of the enemy. The struggle was felt on both sides to be one for life or death. Guthrum's Danes fought with the dogged obstinacy of murderous savages, while Alfred's Englishmen held out with all their might for the righteous defence of their country, their laws, and their freedom. The conflict was fierce and long ; but at length the Northmen were driven back, and the English followed with the determination of exacting a stern vengeance for the wrongs of many years. All who were overtaken were cut down. The rest were shut up in their camp, and there blockaded, until famine should have done its work.

On the fourteenth day Guthrum, acknowledging that they could hold out no longer, sued for peace. It was granted on terms which showed that Alfred's religion was not a mere name. He required that Guthrum and the great chiefs should embrace Christianity, that they should give hostages for their good faith, and that they should forthwith leave his kingdom.

The terms were accepted, and, yet more, they were kept, for Guthrum could scarcely fail to see that it was to his interest to keep them. By the treaty known as the peace of Wedmore

(A.D. 878), Guthrum became the vassal king of East Anglia ; and the whole land beyond Watling Street, a line stretching from the Thames through Bedford to the Welsh border, passed under the sway of the Danish chief. England was thus portioned into the three divisions, Wessex, Mercia, and Denelagu, or the realm in which the law was Danish.

Alfred's earthly wars were not yet ended. He was yet to baffle the efforts by which the sea-king Hasting, whose name had become a sound of terror on the banks of the Seine, strove for three years to win for himself a fairer domain in England. He was yet to do battle with the Danes by sea as well as by land ; but the main fury of the storm had passed away, and he was able now to turn his thoughts to tasks by which the welfare of his people might be permanently promoted.

Having provided for the defence of the country, and having, especially, established a navy with which the Danish ships were wholly unable to cope, he set to work to reform the administration of justice, to draw up a new code according with the requirements of the time, and in every possible way to encourage learning, culture, and refinement. The horrors of the Danish inroads had well-nigh dealt a death-blow to all education. His countrymen knew nothing of science, nothing of philosophy, nothing of history ; and he sought to quicken

in them the desire for knowledge by translating such books as the *Epitome* of Orosius (a Spanish priest and historian of the fifth century), and the *Consolations* of the philosopher and statesman Boethius, who was put to death by an ungrateful master, A.D. 524.

He toiled, indeed, for their good as none others had toiled before him; and although he, like all other men, had his faults, there is no reason for supposing that his fair fame was soiled by vices such as some of the sentences of his biographer and of other critics would seem to ascribe to him. "I have striven all my life long," he said, "to live worthily." These are words which would not fall lightly from the lips of a man to whom truthfulness was more precious than the air which he breathed; and they prove conclusively that the statements of his biographer are not to be taken as settling every point on his own authority. In his earlier years he may have been somewhat oppressive, high-handed, and selfish. Later on he made noble amends for his shortcomings, and, dying in 901, he left behind him a name cherished by all with reverence and affection

CHAPTER XIV.

FORTUNES OF THE ENGLISH KINGDOM AND CHURCH FROM 901 TO 954.

ALFRED'S work was worthily carried on by his son Edward, who was chosen and crowned in his stead ; but the looseness of the tie which bound Englishmen together was shown by the resistance or rebellion of his cousin Æthelwald, who claimed the crown as being the son of Alfred's elder brother Æthelred.


The assertion of hereditary right could not be reconciled with the principle of election on which the Witan never scrupled to act when urgent reasons seemed to make it a matter of duty to do so. In this instance Æthelwald appeared ready at first to trust the issue of the quarrel to the arbitrament of battle. On further thought he withdrew to seek aid from the Danes, who were ready enough, as we may suppose, to express their belief in the validity of his claim. They took up arms in his cause, and in his cause they won a victory : but the death of Æthelwald in the fight more than compensated to Edward for his defeat. Henceforth his reign is marked by a steady advance of his power, which with the consent of the Witan he handed on at his death to his son Æthelstan (A.D. 925).

There is no reason to doubt that the reigns

of Edward and of Æthelstan were marked by a steady increase in the power of the kings of Wessex ; but the details of the story are by no means free from difficulties, and we are rapidly approaching a portion of English history in which the difficulties become so great that we must either reject some statements in the tale, or be content to confess our ignorance of the facts as they took place.

Edward seems to have made himself master of all England south of the Humber ; but when we are told that the princes of Wales, Northumberland, Strathclyde, and Scotland all by their own free act submitted to him, "choosing him to father and lord," we can only say that the act must have had little meaning, as they all had to be conquered over again ; and when they were so conquered, the conquest seems to have produced no effect whatever.

Such accounts are worth nothing, unless we have evidence in their favour from more than one side. The traditions of Scotland tell us of a Scottish Grig (Gregory) the Great, who drives out the Danes, humbles England, and conquers Ireland, but who takes no other advantage of his success than to see that these two kingdoms are rightly governed by their legitimate sovereigns. The English traditions know nothing of such a conquest ; and it has been well said that the story is just about as true as the story of the king of Scotland with



seven royal companions rowing the barge of the English king Edgar on the Dee.

The name of Æthelstan is associated especially with the victory of Brunanburgh (A.D. 936), Strangely enough, the victory ends a war of seven years against the very chieftains of Northumberland, Strathclyde, and Scotland who are said of their own accord and with the consent of all their subjects to have submitted themselves to king Edward. The lay which professes to tell the story of this fight speaks of the utter discomfiture of the enemy. Five kings and seven earls lay dead upon the field, and a greater carnage had never been seen "since from the east hither Angles and Saxons came over the broad seas." In spite of all this, the powers, whatever they were, seem to have remained just as they had been. Æthelstan's son and successor Edmund (A.D. 941-946) had again to brace himself to the task of subduing all Northumberland and of expelling two kings; and when Edmund had fallen by the dagger-stroke of a murderer, his brother Eadred, who was chosen in his place (A.D. 946), was compelled to conquer the same people over again.

Ten years after the fight at Brunanburh (A.D. 946), the Scots are represented as giving Eadred oaths that they would do all that he would have them do,—as repeating, in short, the promises which they had made to Edward the son of the great Alfred. So little were the

pledges worth, or rather so misty and worthless is the tradition of the "commendation" of Scotland to the English king Edmund the Elder. Yet this commendation has been said to furnish the true justification for the acts of his namesake the Plantagenet Edward I. in the thirteenth century.

There are things for which a king cannot bind his subjects without their consent, and in which one generation cannot fetter the action of another ; and submission to intruders and invaders is one of them. The wars of the English kings with Scotland after the Norman Conquest were as wanton and as wicked, as cruel and as useless, as those which they waged against the kings of France ; and any justification which is urged for the one holds good of the other. But nothing can justify wrong.

The affections of Eadred were bestowed chiefly on his chancellor Turketul, and on Dunstan, abbot of king Ine's house of Glastonbury. The strongest influence exercised over him was the influence of the Church, and it was felt by Turketul more powerfully than by himself. The chancellor determined to throw off the burden of worldly cares and business. Proclamation was made that he wished to pay all his debts, and to make threefold reparation to any whom he might have wronged. Having bestowed fifty-four of his manors on the king, he gave six to the monastery of Croyland, and

then resigned the abbey itself with all its appurtenances into the hands of the sovereign, from whom he received the whole again with the grant of fresh privileges. Here he lived for twenty-seven years as abbot, and died, leaving at the least a fame more serene than that of his friend Dunstan, whose name is enrolled in the catalogue of the saints.

CHAPTER XV.

EADWIG, DUNSTAN, AND THE CLERGY.

OVER the life of Eadred's nephew and successor Eadwig (A.D. 955-958), the authority of Dunstan cast a baleful shadow. Dunstan was steeped in the spirit of the most rigid monachism, and he regarded the marriage of clergy as an evil not less hideous than unrestrained licence in laymen. He had not yet reached the state of those who denounced the practice of all art as a diabolical snare. He could work in iron, in ivory, in gold, and in silver. It is said too that he could copy manuscripts, and therefore probably he could paint; but his occupations, whatever they were, were all carried on in a cell of some six or seven feet square. Here he wrought out his curious designs, and here he wrestled with the foul fiend, whose nose

he is said to have seized with his fiery pincers. But the solitude which was dear to the heart of Dunstan was less agreeable not merely to English clergymen, but to many who called themselves monks.

Among the monastic societies not a few consisted of men who inhabited them with their wives, and who wished to pledge themselves to nothing more severe than a life of orderly rule, sheltered from the storms which blustered in the outward world. Under such conditions monachism in Dunstan's eyes was a mere mockery. The clergy, secular as well as regular, must be brought under a rigid yoke of celibacy, and all monks must become monks indeed.

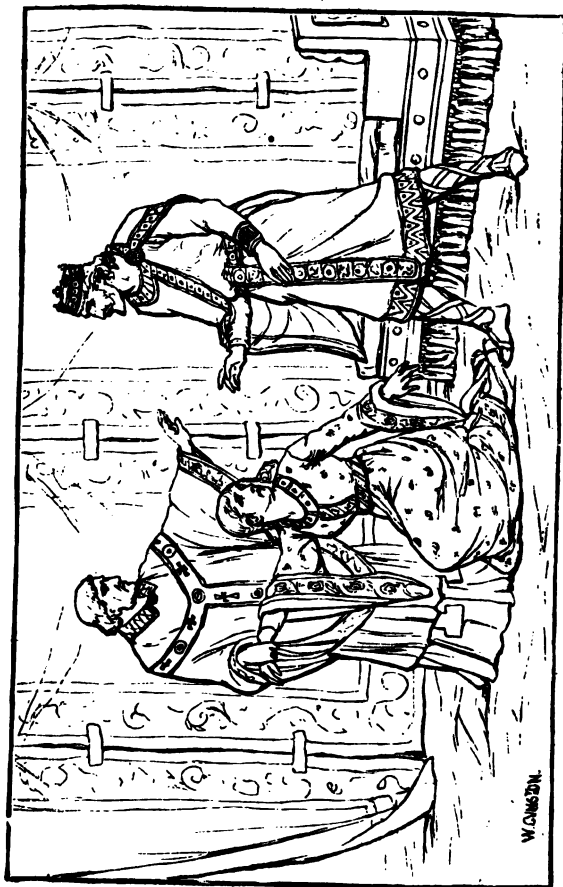
To bring this about, he had to engage in a hard warfare ; but he was aided in his task by a gift of miracles, many of which unfortunately bear upon them a strange look of fraud. A council of the clergy (some under, and some not under, monastic rule, the former being known as the regular clergy, and the latter as the secular clergy) was held at Calne. Dunstan and his supporters were at one end of the room, when the platform on which his opponents stood came down with a crash, and buried many in the ruins.

The accident was singularly opportune,—so opportune indeed as to remind us forcibly of Dunstan's mechanical skill. His biographers

are loud in praises of the holiness which was rewarded with such signal proofs of Divine grace ; but it has been well said that they have unconsciously darkened him into one of the most odious of mankind.

Dunstan's monastic zeal found means to display itself at the coronation of Eadwig. From the banquet the young king hurried away with perhaps inconsiderate haste to the society of his wife and her mother. It is at the least possible that he found it more congenial than the riotous drinking which went on in the great hall. The nobles, we are told, felt themselves insulted by his departure, and Dunstan acted as their willing messenger to force him back to the unwelcome revelry. He further declared their will that the young wife's mother must be driven away under pain of death if she should dare to return. But Æthelgifu did not go, and Dunstan did not forget the menaces which expressed her indignation.

Eadwig's throne was not a bed of roses. His authority had been disowned in the country to the north of the Thames, where his brother Eadgar had been chosen king. He attempted to put down this resistance, but his forces were inadequate to the task ; and he was hastening back with Æthelgifu into Wessex, when his pursuers got hold of the unhappy woman, and left her ham-strung by the wayside to die in her misery. The monkish chroniclers, not



EDWY (EDDY) AND DUNSTAN.

content with this savage retribution, blackened her character, as well as that of her daughter, with charges of the most heinous kind.

The reason for this is plain. Dunstan, who had been banished from Eadwig's territories, had been welcomed in those of his brother Eadgar. The latter befriended, the former set himself against, the schemes which treated the marriage of the clergy as both a crime and a sin. The great battle, which was to decide whether the clergy were to remain a part of the people or not, was being fought out here more obstinately than perhaps in any other country of Europe ; and it was one on the issue of which, as Englishmen feel to this day, the happiness of the people largely depended. It has been treated by historians generally as a mere ecclesiastical dispute. It was really a matter which affected the highest interests of Englishmen as closely as any of the liberties secured to them by the Great Charter.

Eadwig lived only a year after his recognition of his brother as the under-king of Mercia. Some said that he was murdered ; others that he died of a broken heart. He was probably not much more than twenty years of age ; and Eadgar, who now, by the choice of the Witan, became king of Wessex as well as of Mercia (A.D. 958), was about six years younger. Eadwig, from his beauty, was known as the Fair ; Eadgar, from the good fortune which

saved him from all serious wars, won a wider renown as the Peaceful.

His election meant really the triumph of Dunstan, who, as Archbishop of Canterbury, fought on, not only against the marriage of the clergy, but to make all the clergy monks, or, in other words, to bring them all under the discipline of monastic rule. He was only partially successful ; and in this country it can scarcely be said that the victory of Dunstan's followers was ever really complete.

CHAPTER XVI.

REIGNS OF EADGAR AND ÆTHELRED.

THAT the sixteen years of Eadgar's reign (A.D. 958—975) were a time of much prosperity for England, and that he exercised a real authority over the whole land, is beyond doubt. Apart from the petty warfare which seldom ceased on the Welsh border, he had no enemies to encounter ; and for the Danes who were established in the land he had only a friendly feeling, which expressed itself in the resolution that they should be on precisely the same footing with his other subjects. Popular fancy, indeed, soon busied itself with exalting the greatness of this peaceful king. In place of

money, Eadgar, it is said, insisted that the Welsh should bring him as their yearly tribute the heads of three hundred wolves ; and in four years, we are assured, the impost ceased with the death of the last wolf.

According to the common belief the English kings derived their authority from their election by the free Witan, and from their hallowing or coronation together ; and we shall find, when we reach the time of the Norman conquest, that the Ætheling, although chosen king, was easily set aside in favour of the victorious Duke William, because, although elected, he had not been crowned.

But for some reason, which has not been mentioned, the crowning or hallowing in Eadgar's case did not take place until he had been king for fifteen years. He was then crowned at Bath, A.D. 973, and thence, taking ship, went by sea to Chester, where, according to the story, eight vassal kings, headed by Kenneth of Scotland, rowed his barge on the Dee. We have seen already what this tale may be worth (p. 81).

As a general rule, we may reasonably suspect the truth of any stories of which the writers of the time know nothing. We shall see, when we come to the reign of Henry II., that the beautiful legend which relates the incident leading to the marriage of the mother of Thomas Becket must be rejected, not because it is full

of marvels, but because it is unknown to the friends of the Archbishop, who would have been eager to believe and to relate it, if they had ever heard it. So we doubt the story of Eadgar's offering to fight Kenneth of Scotland for calling him a dwarf, because we find this mentioned for the first time by William of Malmesbury, who lived nearly a century and a half later.

From the same writer we have the story which tells us how Eadgar came to marry his second wife Ælfthryth, or, as she is called in the Latin form of the name, Elfrida. Hearing of her astonishing beauty, the king sent a friend to see whether she was worthy of sharing his throne. The friend saw, wooed, and won her for himself, and then told the king that she was much like other women. But as the reports of her exceeding loveliness reached him again, the king declared that he would go and see her with his own eyes. His friend in dismay besought his wife to hide her beauty from the king. His entreaties only made her resolve to display before him the full splendour of her charms ; and the king in a hunt, which took place soon afterwards, found an opportunity for thrusting his spear through the body of his friend. The widow became the wife of Eadgar and the mother of Æthelred, a king whom the English people had little reason to honour or regret.

Two years after his coronation (A.D. 975)

Eadgar died. He was not much more than thirty years old. Of his two sons, Edward, the child of his first wife, was only thirteen years of age, and Æthelred was a boy of seven. After a strife which threatened to run on into civil war, Edward, whom his father wished to have as his successor, was chosen king. Three years later (A.D. 978), he was stabbed at the gate of Corfe Castle, where his stepmother was then living. Ælfthryth is said to have hired the murderer, that her son might take his brother's place. Her wish, if it was her wish, was fulfilled. The assassin's dagger won for Edward the name of the Martyr ; and the Witan chose for their king the boy Æthelred, known as the Unready.

The meaning of this name is commonly misunderstood. It does not mean that Æthelred was always taken by surprise, or that he was never active and stirring. He was seldom caught unawares, and he often showed as much energy as any of his predecessors. But he was never active at the right season or in the right place ; and times were coming which would tax the wisdom, strength, and resolution even of an Æthelstan or an Alfred. The troubles came, and they found in place of these great men a prince well described as the Unready, or the Witless, the epithet being suggested directly by his name Æthelred, which denotes the man of noble mind and sound judgment.



ASSASSINATION OF EDWARD THE MARTYR AT THE GATE OF CORFE CASTLE.

He had, indeed, to contend with the same enemies which they encountered. The Danes in the days of Egbert had come first as wandering marauders, landing one day and vanishing the next; then as armies disciplined for a campaign; and lastly as permanent settlers (p. 63). Since that time, the Danes of East Anglia and Northumbria had become part and parcel of the English people and of the English nation, so far as an English nation could then be said to exist; and their right to all the liberties of Englishmen had been fully acknowledged by Eadgar and other kings.

But the land from which the old swarms had come was ready to send forth new. The plague of these later invasions fell first on the southern coasts of England, and it passed away for a time altogether. The marauders then attacked the northern coast of Somerset, and three years later landed on the east coast of the island, in numbers and with a discipline which implied a purpose of something like settlement. An army of Norwegians, it would seem, under Olaf Triggvasson, the sainted king of Norway, plundered Ipswich, and defeated in the battle of Maldon, A.D. 993, the heroic Ældorman Brihtnoth.

Before the two armies came to blows, the invaders offered to leave the country if the English would pay them a sum of money to be assessed by themselves. Brihtnoth refused the request with indignation; but the marauders

could scarcely have made it had they not known that the idea of such a compact was not altogether unfamiliar to Englishmen. They thought probably that the measure dealt out by Alfred himself and by the Mercian king to the Danes of that age might be meted out to themselves (p. 72). Æthelred, it is true, greedily adopted the device which Brihtnoth had spurned with angry contempt; but it cannot be said that he invented it.

The difference between Æthelred and Alfred lay in the simple fact that he trusted in bribery as an end, and that Alfred did not. Savages seldom keep their word. Alfred learnt the lesson at once; Æthelred never learnt it through a reign of nearly forty years. If Alfred offered money to Guthrum, he at the same time raised troops, built ships, and made ready in every way to drive out the enemy; when Æthelred paid money, he did so that he might be saved the trouble of doing anything more.

Æthelred soon found that he had traitors to deal with as well as enemies; but we cannot say with the same certainty that he made it a rule to restore traitors to the trusts which they had betrayed. It is one of the most inexplicable features in the history of this strange and troubled time, that treachery is busy and successful everywhere, and that its deadly work is done not merely with impunity, but to the gain and exaltation of the traitor. It is this which

makes the narrative so far incredible. Either the historians have strangely confused names, and jumbled two, three, or more men into one person, or the kings and their Witan were insane. To a certain extent we are brought to this alternative in the reign of Æthelred ; we are driven to it absolutely in dealing with the history of his heroic son Edmund Ironside.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DANISH INVASIONS, AND THE MASSACRE OF ST. BRICE.

THE Mercian Ældorman Ælfric was the first in this long line of traitors. His first act was to send the enemy a warning, which enabled them to avoid being surrounded by the English fleet ; his second was to join them with his own squadron (A.D. 992). In this instance the invaders were defeated in the fight which followed. Ælfric's ship was taken, and he alone escaped. Æthelred put out the eyes of his son, a boy too young to have any share in his father's crime ; but he received the father back, we are told, into his favour, and placed it in his power to betray him once more.

Two years later, A.D. 994, a combined force of Danes under their king Swend, and of Norwegians under Olaf, undertook a task which

aimed at nothing less than the conquest of all England. As a plea for his invasion, Swend urged the inhospitable treatment which in earlier years he had undergone at the hands of Æthelred, who had driven him from his court and compelled him to seek refuge with Kenneth of Scotland. Olaf, so far as we know, offered no excuse at all. Their attack was directed against London, but they were disastrously defeated and repulsed by the bravery and wise conduct of the citizens.

For Æthelred the example of the Londoners had no attraction, and it taught him no lesson. The tidings that the defeated enemy were ravaging the coasts, burning and slaying as they went, suggested only the old device of bribery. Wessex was taxed to furnish food and pay for the crews, and the kingdom was taxed to provide a payment of sixteen thousand pounds for the two invading kings.

After wintering at Southampton the Danes and the Norwegians departed. Olaf went to return no more. He had promised to remain neutral, and he kept his promise. If he did so from a sense of his duty as a Christian, he should have the credit which he deserves ; but the history of his life shows that his zeal for Christianity was on the same level with that of Mahomet for Islam.¹ Each enforced his faith at the sword's point ; but the action of the Christian who professed to receive the Sermon

on the Mount was more incongruous than that of the Arabian prophet, who offered to the unbeliever the choice of the Koran or death.

Nine years passed before Swend came back to England, and he came then to take dire vengeance for a great crime, and to dethrone the criminal Æthelred. In the meanwhile, this ill-judging prince had been brought into relations with another sovereign, which were to affect deeply the future history of England. It had been the custom of the northern marauders and pirates to sell in the ports of Normandy the booty gathered on the English coasts. With his usual infatuation, Æthelred seems to have thought it an easier task to deal with the Norman duke than with a Danish or Norwegian chieftain.

He had no hesitation, therefore, in sending a fleet and in charging the admiral, it is said, to bring to him the Norman duke with his hands tied behind his back (A.D. 996). The fleet returned with the tidings that of the whole army landed from the ships one man only had escaped alive. The tale is probably a gross exaggeration; but it seems to prove that the English were decisively defeated.

The peace which followed ended in a closer alliance. Æthelred's first wife, the mother of Edmund Ironside, was dead. As his second wife he wedded (A.D. 1002) Emma, the sister of the duke of Normandy; and thus the two

countries were brought into relations which suggested to Duke William two generations later the possibility of his becoming King of England.

In her new home Emma was known by the name *Ælfgifu*, which in its Latinised form becomes *Elgiva* (the *gift* of the *elves*, or fairies). Here she became the mother of Edward the Confessor, whose extravagant fondness for everything Norman and dislike of everything English led directly to the overthrow of Harold at Senlac (Hastings).

Soon after this marriage the Danish ravages were renewed on a large scale, and were marked by treasons which argue singular blindness in those who furnished the opportunities for their execution. Pallig, a Dane of high rank, it would seem (as he had married Gunhild, a sister of King Swend), entered the service of *Æthelred*. He was intrusted with the command of a fleet; and the use which he made of this trust was to join the Danish fleet and sail with them up the Teign, burning and destroying all that came in their way. Again *Æthelred* compounded with the enemy for the cessation of their ravages; and having done this, he seems to have thought that secret slaughter might achieve a deliverance not to be hoped for from battle in the open field.

The scheme which he devised, and which was carried out on St. Brice's day, November 1002,

is commonly supposed to have aimed at the destruction of the whole Danish population in England,—in other words, of perhaps half, or more than half, the inhabitants of East Anglia and Northumberland. So regarded, it might most fairly be, as it has been, classed with such crowning iniquities as the massacre of the eve of St. Bartholomew.¹

But bad though Æthelred may have been both as a king and as a man, we have no more excuse for judging him, than for judging any one else, unjustly. The only writer belonging to the time whose testimony we have is the English chronicler, who, under the year 1002, tells us of an order issued by Æthelred for the slaying of all the Danish men in England. "This," he adds, "was done on St. Brice's mass-day, because it had been made known to the king that the Danes purposed to take his life and afterwards that of all his Witan (or councillors), and so to get his kingdom."

There is nothing in this statement which makes it necessary to suppose that the order was given or executed in secrecy, while the chronicler seems distinctly to say that only Danish men were to be slain. This at once shuts out any notion of a massacre of Danes whose families had been peaceably settled in the country for generations; and the conclusion is that the order was directed against those of the recent Danish invaders who had remained in England

after the last treaty, which stayed their hands with English gold. It was directed therefore against enemies who had broken their word, who could not be trusted, and who were habitually and invariably foresworn ; and the plan was devised as a requital, and an anticipation, of treachery for which nothing could be urged by way of excuse or even of palliation.

The next writer who tells us anything about this massacre is Florence, a monk of Worcester, who died (A.D. 1118) half a century after the Norman conquest, and who therefore could not have heard of the massacre for at least fifty or sixty years after it had taken place. With Florence the plan, whatever it was, has become an order for slaying all the Danish inhabitants of Anglia, old and young, men and women. Of the letters sent secretly throughout the country, making arrangements for the secret slaughter, we hear only from a still later writer, Henry of Huntingdon.

This will show us the way in which popular accounts of historical facts are often made up, and in which the stories actually grow, each succeeding narrator throwing in some touches of his own. That many Danes were killed is certain ; that they received from Æthelred any worse measure than they had intended to deal out to him is by no means so clear. Of the slaying of women we know nothing, except in a single instance ; and this is the death of Gunhild, sister of the

Danish king Swend, and wife of the traitorous Ældorman Pallig. Gunhild, we are told, was beheaded, after seeing her husband and her child slaughtered before her eyes.

If we take the story as true, we have before us a public execution, which seems altogether inconsistent with any scheme of secret massacre; and the punishment of Pallig is only the punishment which he would have undergone in almost any age and any country. Gunhild died, warning her murderers that her death would bring upon them a swift recompense; but it needed no special foresight to announce this result of a great and foolish crime.

¹ By the word Islam Mahometans denote the whole body of believers in the creed of the Koran, their sacred book.

² The massacre of the Huguenots, carried out in Paris and elsewhere, in the reign of Charles IX., A.D. 1572.

CHAPTER XVIII.

INVASION OF SWEND, KING OF DENMARK.

A FEW months later (A.D. 1003) the Danish king Swend set foot again on English soil, as the avenger of his sister. Gunhild had been put to death at the bidding of Eadric, known as Streone, or the Gainer, who had from a low estate risen high in the favour of Æthelred, whose daughter he married. In this murderer of

Gunhild Swend found his most useful ally, and there is nothing incredible in the story of his first treason, and little perhaps even in that of the second. It is only when we find these treasons repeated with amazing rapidity and each time recompensed with increased confidence and fresh promotion of the traitor by his victims, that we begin first to suspend and presently to withdraw our belief from the stories of these later iniquities.

These tales must be carefully distinguished from the traditions of the Danish slaughter on St. Brice's day, as well as from others which are embellished and exaggerated as time goes on. The crimes of Eadric and his fellow-traitors may be more highly coloured in the pages of later writers ; but they are recorded in the chronicles, which beyond doubt were drawn up almost as soon as the events related in them took place. There the statements are; and we may call them riddles or enigmas if we please. There is no historian who does not frankly admit that it is a riddle which needs to be solved, and that it is utterly inexplicable.

This being the case, some historians have called upon their readers to accept the story as it stands. This, of course, we may do, if the incidents narrated are not in themselves incredible ; but, except in its earlier scenes, the history of Eadric Streone is past all belief, unless indeed we assume that the king and

all his Council were utterly wicked, or incurably insane.

If the English fleet under Lord Nelson had been treacherously betrayed and destroyed on the banks of the Nile ; and if we were told that at Lord Nelson's special desire the traitor had been placed as his second in command of the fleet at Copenhagen not long afterwards, we should say that the fact was incredible unless Nelson and all who had any concern in making the appointment had gone mad. But if we were told that the fleet at Copenhagen had been betrayed and destroyed like the fleet in Aboukir Bay,¹ and that the traitor had nevertheless been appointed the colleague of Nelson at Trafalgar, we should answer that no amount of testimony could convince us of the truth of absolute impossibilities.

Yet the history of Eadric Streone is not a jot more credible than that of the supposed betrayer of the fleets commanded by Lord Nelson. In short, we can make nothing of it ; and we are only guessing, if we try, as some have tried, to explain it by saying that there were three, four, or more traitors, whose successive crimes have all been ascribed to one who was probably the most skilful leader of the day in the paths of treason.

The main points to be remembered are, that the time with which we are now dealing was one of constant and violent commotion, involv-

ing the utmost wretchedness, and the upsetting of all orderly government ; that the king and his favourites showed a defiant disregard of their duty, and that the people were, for the time, in most ways better than their rulers. It is of far more importance to have this fact impressed upon our minds than to have our memory loaded with the names and the deeds of all the actors in the story. The mere cramming and stuffing down of events with their dates, and of the names of kings and generals with a string of their exploits, is a thoroughly useless and mischievous work, unless we really catch the meaning of what they did, and see why things went in one way rather than in another.

We need only say, then, that from the days of Æthelred to those of Harold who fell at Senlac a crop of traitors was never wanting. When Swend reached England, he was opposed by Ælfric, who, ten years before, had betrayed an English fleet to its destruction (p. 95). Ælfric was now in command of the army, and when the enemy came in sight a pretended fit of sickness served as an excuse for avoiding a fight, and the invader was left to carry on his murderous work unhindered.

In the following year (1004) the Danish attack on Norwich roused the patriotic spirit of Ulfcytel, who commanded in East Anglia, and whose name attests his Danish descent.

Norwich was taken by Swend and burnt ; and the Council of the East Anglian kingdom, summoned by Ulfcytel, resolved to make peace with the invader. But no promises could bind Swend, the apostate from Christianity to heathenism.

The Danes assailed and burnt Thetford ; and Ulfcytel faced them in a battle which was virtually a victory for the English, although neither side, it would seem, kept the field. The invaders frankly confessed that never in England had they undergone hand-play so severe as that which marked this fight. The course of events would have been different indeed, if all the English leaders had been true and loyal men like Ulfcytel.

¹ Nelson was victorious at Aboukir Bay, in 1798, and at Copenhagen in 1801.

CHAPTER XIX.

DEPOSITION AND FLIGHT OF ÆTHELRED.

THE career of Ulfcytel stands out in pleasant contrast with that of Eadric Streone, to whom murder was as congenial as treason. The Danish inroads went on with one break, which lasted for two years (A.D. 1007-8) ; and by the advice of his Council Æthelred

availed himself of the respite to raise a fleet equal to the task before it. The ships were built and manned ; but the work was done to less than no purpose. A brother of Eadric thought fit to bring charges against a South Saxon chief. The latter, persuading the men of the ships contributed by his own shire to follow him, began to ravage the coast. His accuser, sent after him, lost a multitude of ships in a terrible storm.

The result was utter panic. The king with his councillors abandoned the fleet, and hurried away to London by land. The seamen sailed back up the Thames. In the words of the chronicler, "The folk's toil was left lightly to perish, and there was no victory that all Angle-kin had hoped for."

Unhappily the Angle-kin had not yet grown into an English nation. Some months later Ulfcytel ventured again to face the enemy in the field ; but the treacherous desertion of a Thane, sprung of a Danish stock, insured his defeat. The English were now so thoroughly disunited that any further stand seemed hopeless. Such forces as they raised were never in the right place, and never forthcoming when they were needed. They came and they went at their will, and of the shires we are told that not one would so much as help another. Sometimes peace was bought by money ; but the bargain was never kept. The

invaders found the plundering of cities and the ransoming or selling of prisoners too profitable.

At Canterbury their expectations were in part disappointed by the steady resolution of the Archbishop Ælfheah (Alphege). He had, so (we are told) they said, promised them a ransom. When after some weeks they insisted on its being paid, he replied that he had sinned in making the promise. He would pay nothing, and he would allow no one else to pay anything for his life. His captors pelted him with bones and then clove his skull with an axe (A.D. 1012).

Some eighty or ninety years later the Norman bishops of English sees betrayed their want of faith by asking Anselm, who then sat in Ælfheah's seat, whether a man was a real martyr who died only to prevent others from being compelled to pay an unjust tribute. Anselm's true perception of the Christian spirit was shown in his reply, that Ælfheah was a martyr "because he died for justice, and justice is of the essence of Christ, even though His name be not mentioned." Like Dunstan, Ælfheah was reckoned among the saints of the church. Unlike Dunstan, he belongs also to the great company of merciful men whose names should be had in everlasting remembrance.

The Danish leader Thurkill had tried to save the archbishop's life. It is not unlikely that the spirit of self-sacrifice and love exhibited in the life and death of the primate may have

determined him to abjure heathenism for Christianity. At the same time he resolved also to transfer his allegiance from Swend to Æthelred. Bringing with him forty-five ships he pledged himself to defend England against all enemies; and for nearly as long as Æthelred lived the pledge was faithfully kept.

It may have been in great part for the purpose of punishing Thurkill for his desertion that Swend in the following year (1013) sailed up the Humber, and addressed himself to the Danish portion of the population. His appeal was one which they could not or would not resist. They received him as their king, and then crossing the border of the purely English land, he harried it with the merciless fury of a savage.

He experienced no serious check until he reached London, where Thurkill helped to beat his army back from the walls of the city. Retreating from London he marched to Bath, where all the western Thanes, headed by the Ældorman of Devonshire, gave him hostages and made their submission. That this act involved the deposition of Æthelred, seems clear from the statement of the chronicler, that from this time all the people acknowledged Swend as full king. It is absurd to regard their act as a free election, but in form at least it was an expression of their will.

When a few days later he appeared again before the walls of London, the citizens sub-

mitted from sheer dread of the vengeance which he threatened to take on them. But though the Londoners gave way, Thurkill, with his fleet at Greenwich, where the archbishop Ælfheah had been murdered, stood out boldly for Æthelred, who took refuge on board his ship. From Greenwich the deposed king escaped to the Isle of Wight, whence he made his way to the court of his father-in-law, the Norman duke, leaving Thurkill and Swend to levy taxes or ravage the land as they would.

But the career of Swend was fast drawing to a close. Æthelred landed in Normandy in the second week in January 1014. Early in February Swend died, and if we may believe Danish writers, he died professedly a Christian. From English chroniclers we gather no other proof of his Christianity than his denial of the title of saint to the East Anglian king Edmund, who had been slain by Danes, and whose body rested in the minster of the city which bears his name.

The story, as they relate it, tells us that Swend vowed dire vengeance on the monks of St. Edmund's Bury if they failed to pay the tribute which he imposed on them, and that he had mounted his horse to carry out his threat, when he saw Edmund himself hurrying towards him in full armour and with his lance raised. No other eye beheld the vision which made him cry out in terror, "Help, fellow-soldiers! Saint

Edmund is come to slay me." The martyred king ran him through with his spear, and in a few hours Swend died in great agony. The tale, it is clear, grew up from the tradition that the Danish chief died suddenly just when he had expressed his intention of punishing the monks of St. Edmund's minster.

CHAPTER XX.

THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN EDMUND IRONSIDE AND CNUT.

ON the death of Swend the crews of the Danish fleet chose his son Cnut, who was then at Gainsborough, as their king. His English subjects, holding that Swend's death absolved them from their allegiance, resolved on the recall of Æthelred. Their message to him was that no lord could be dearer to them than he who was their kin-lord, if he would only rule them better than he had done before. Æthelred promised amendment, and to some extent he kept his promise.

Cnut was making ready for a plundering expedition in which he was to be joined by the men of Lindesey, in Lincolnshire; but Æthelred was quicker in his movements. Cnut was driven to his ships after a defeat which must have been decisive, for he hastened away to Sandwich, and there put on shore the hostages in his possession,

having first cut off their ears, their noses, and their hands.

Æthelred, on his side, acted scarcely less savagely than the Dane. He ravaged Lindesey, "burning and slaying all whom he could reach." He also added to the sufferings of his people by extorting from them a sum, it is said, of thirty thousand pounds for the fleet of Thurkill, who for the present continued to take his part. Thurkill might have held himself released from his engagement by the flight of Æthelred. It is certain that he continued to serve him after his return from Normandy; but it seems also clear that he had gone back to his Danish master before Æthelred's death.

In the history of this most miserable time almost every step seems marked by murder. In a meeting of the Witan held at Oxford, Eadric Streone slew Sigefirth and Morcar, two of the chief Thanes of what are called the Seven Boroughs, these boroughs being York and Chester, together with the Fife-burghers or people of the five boroughs of Leicester, Stamford, Derby, Nottingham, and Lincoln. Æthelred's share in the crime is shown in his confiscation of the property of the murdered men, and by his order for the imprisonment of Sigefirth's widow at Malmesbury. But at this point he was perhaps surprised by the resistance of Edmund, his son, and probably the eldest surviving son of his first marriage.

Edmund had seen the widow, and having resolved on making her his wife, he followed her to Malmesbury, and married her against his father's will. His demand of the estates of Sigcfrith was refused, and seizing both his estates and those of Morcar, he received the allegiance of the Fife-burghers, and thus became in some sort an independent prince (A.D. 1015).

He had soon plenty of work to do. Cnut, who had gone to Denmark and returned with a fleet splendidly equipped, was ravaging the shires of Somerset, Dorset, and Wilts. Edmund did what he could to raise a force to meet him. Eadric Streone, his brother-in-law, professed to do the same; but when the armies joined, he made various attempts to murder Edmund, and then, having gained over the crews of forty Danish ships, which must have belonged to Thurkill's fleet, he openly went over to Cnut. Thus far we may perhaps give credit to the story of his treasons; but that Edmund should after this admit him to his friendship and to a momentous trust is not merely a riddle or enigma; it is, except on the supposition that Edmund was mad, an utter impossibility.

Wessex now submitted to the invader, and Æthelred, smitten with his last sickness, busied himself not with preparations for resistance, but with putting down plots which he pretended to have discovered against his own person. Cnut at last advanced against London, but at South-

ampton received tidings of Æthelred's death (1016).

There had never been in any true sense of the word an English nation ; but such growth as might have welded the English people into a nation was effectually checked and repressed by the shameful misgovernment of Æthelred's long reign of thirty-seven years. He had scarcely passed beyond the threshold of middle age, and he bequeathed to his people a legacy of wretchedness which overwhelmed his heroic son, and familiarised them with the practice of exchanging one master for another. The way which he opened for Swend and Cnut was opened also for William the Conqueror.

What Edmund might have done, had his life been spared, we cannot say. He reigned for seven months only, and this short time was taken up with almost constant fighting. At starting he had to withstand practically the whole country. Chosen king by the Witan gathered in London alone, he was confronted by Cnut, who had been acknowledged lord by the Witan of all the rest of the land. In spite of this men flocked to his standard from north and south, from east and west ; and six pitched battles showed that English kings could still lead skilfully as well as bravely, and that Englishmen could be worthy of their leader.

The first task of Cnut was to besiege London ; but his assaults were successfully repelled by

the citizens, and he marched westwards against Edmund, who encountered and defeated him at the Pens or high ground bordering on the forest of Selwood. The issue of the second battle, fought at Sherstone, in Wiltshire, was more doubtful. Here Eadric, fighting on the Danish side, slew a man whose features were much like those of Edmund, and held up his head as that of the king in sight of the English ranks. For a moment they wavered, but Edmund, taking off his helmet and showing his face to his men, hurled his spear at Eadric, but unhappily missed his aim. Though the battle was drawn, Cnut was virtually defeated. He retreated from the field during the night, and again laid siege to London.

CHAPTER XXI.

DEATH OF EDMUND IRONSIDE.

IT is at this point that Florence, the Worcester monk, who was at this time not yet born, places the reconciliation of the traitor Eadric with the king whom he had repeatedly betrayed, and whom he had attempted to smite with the assassin's dagger. It is quite possible that the issues of the battles of Pen Selwood and of Sherstone may have warned Eadric that Cnut was playing a losing game. But although Eadric may have wished to change sides once

more, it is significant that the chronicle has no statement that he succeeded in doing so at the time and place assigned by Florence of Worcester.

Edmund's third battle drove the Danes from the walls of London to their ships. His fourth battle, fought at Brentford, ended in a victory impaired by the loss of many of his men, who were drowned in trying to cross the river. It is after this fight that the chronicle for the first time speaks of Eadric as going to meet the king at Aylesford ; the comment being simply that no measure could be more ill-advised. Edmund's victory in his fifth battle at Otford is said to have been rendered useless by the devices of Eadric, who saved the Danish army from utter destruction. But it is 'at the least possible that Edmund may have been unable to accomplish more.

In his sixth battle, fought at Assandun, the defeat of the English is said to have been insured by Eadric, who, at the head of the troops gathered from his old earldom, went over to the enemy just as they were beginning to give way. Probably the rout was not so disastrous and overwhelming as it is represented to have been. Edmund prepared for a seventh battle ; but Cnut seems to have felt that a partition of the country without a fight would be better in his own interest. Edmund assented to a conference ; and there seems to be no absolute

need to regard this assent as brought about by the devices of Eadric.

By the terms agreed on at this conference, which was held at Olney, Edmund was to reign over the country south of the Thames together with London, Essex, and East Anglia. He was also, whatever might now be its value, to have the dignity of over-lord of the whole realm. Of actual territory Cnut had the larger share ; but if he chafed at the name of vassalage, the titular inferiority was soon to come to an end.

Within a few weeks Edmund Ironside lay dead in London ; and the claims which might be urged in favour of his brothers or his sons were set aside, in part perhaps by the provisions of the treaty of Olney, but formally by the deliberate device of the Witan, whether acting under constraint or not. Cnut, king already of the Mercians and Northumbrians, became king also of Wessex and East Anglia (A.D. 1017), and the sceptre passed from English hands to those of the Danish chief who had first trodden English soil as a pirate, and who was charged with having gained the English throne by secret murder.

There is no actual evidence to prove that Edmund of the Ironside died a violent death. The ceaseless anxiety and Herculean toil of the last seven months had been enough to shatter the frame and destroy the strength of the stoutest of the sons of men. But the sudden

collapse of such mighty energy, just when a continuance of it was most needed, naturally suggested to his followers and friends that he had met with foul play; and the crime was necessarily ascribed to Eadric.

Fancy, fed by wrath, soon invented terrible details for the tragedy; but so far as we can see, English suspicions did not travel on from Eadric to Cnut. It is from Danish writers only that we hear of Cnut as employing Eadric in a work, of which assuredly Cnut reaped the whole benefit; and certainly we cannot plead in his favour that his conduct after Edmund's death was such as to vindicate his innocence in the eyes of the world.

Whether Edmund's excellence as a king and statesman would, if he had lived, have equalled his renown as a warrior, we cannot say. There was little or nothing in his opposition to his father to justify an unfavourable judgment. Whoever withstood Æthelred was more likely to be right than wrong; and Edmund's brief reign left him no time for any matters except those which were involved in preparation for the battle-field. As it was, he passed away, leaving behind him a name as splendid as that of his father was shameful, and his body, borne to the great minster of Glastonbury, was laid not far from that of his namesake and predecessor Edmund the Magnificent, who with his father Æthelstan won the day at Brunanburgh.

CHAPTER XXII.

CONDITION AND HABITS OF THE ENGLISH
PEOPLE.

FROM what has been already said in the preceding chapters, some notion may be formed of the character of the first German settlers in Britain, and of their descendants. We have seen something of them in their best aspects, and something also in their worst. We have marked most of their good and also most of their bad qualities, and the picture of their merits and their vices must give us some idea of the conditions under which they spent their lives. Gluttony and drunkenness, savage quarrels and fierce fights, point to modes of life which leave little room for our modern ideas of comfort and quiet enjoyment.

Yet these rude and even brutal forefathers of the English people brought with them to their new country a deep-seated respect for law, with a sense of the value of truthfulness and fair dealing, and of the sacredness of home. They recognised and revered the relations of husband and wife, of parents and children, of brothers and sisters. They had an inborn capacity for self-government, and an inborn hatred of tyranny and oppression. They knew nothing of service to any master except one whom they had chosen for themselves, or of

obedience to any laws except those which they had themselves had a voice in passing. They were thus pre-eminently a people with a power of growth. Their progress might be slow. They might seem to grope their way and often to lose it ; but when improvement comes from below, and spreads outwards and upwards, it is more sure and permanent than any which is merely forced on a people by their rulers.

We have seen something of this upward growth of the English people (p. 25), of their ideas of property, of their land tenure, and of the framework which they devised for their own government (p. 26) ; and from this we can form some notion of their mode of life in the country and in the town. Our chief business is to learn to know the past as it really was, and the men of the past as they really were. The history of a nation is the history of the daily life of the persons who make up the nation, of their wishes and their wants, of their privations and their comforts, of the abundance or the scantiness of their resources, of the happiness or the misery of their homes. By comparison with these the policy of statesmen and the exploits of warriors have little interest or value ; and indeed they have none, except in so far as the records of them help us to know how the people lived and suffered, and how far their lot was one of prosperity or of wretchedness, of growth in good or of lapse into evil.

But when we come to details, when we wish to picture to ourselves accurately the aspect of the land which they inhabited, and of the houses or huts in which they lived, their occupations and their amusements, their manners and personal habits, we undertake a task which cannot be mastered without years of study, and for which, in order to master the whole of it thoroughly, the leisure of a long life is scarcely sufficient.

In all countries, except those in which the people are mere savages, the lapse of ages will change many things. But with us the revolution wrought in the conditions of our life even during the present century is so vast, that it is hard for any whose memories go back only for ten or twenty years to picture to themselves the England of the days of George III. ; nor was it altogether easy for the contemporaries of George III. to form an exact idea of the England of the time of Queen Elizabeth. In the reign of George III. the journey from Aberdeen or Edinburgh to London had been reduced from weeks to days ; it has now become a matter of a few hours. A century and a half ago a good highroad was to be found only along the main lines of communication ; and in the time of Charles I. the roads were for the most part bridle paths, along which horses might struggle through mire and bogs, but on which a wheeled vehicle was never seen.

But when we go back to the days not of Henry VIII. or Henry I., but to a time compared with which that of either of these kings is modern, we cannot form even the vaguest idea of the condition of the country or its people except by casting aside all, or almost all, the associations and impressions of our common experience. We are familiar with vast towns, with beautiful and magnificent buildings, with comforts which kings and nobles could not command in the days of the Plantagenets. Then we could have seen nothing more than collections of a few hundred houses surrounded by a palisade or a wall.

We are accustomed to the sight of huge sailing ships able to carry hundreds of men, or of steamers which, against wind and tide, can convey thousands in ease and even in luxury from one end of the world to the other. Then by the side of some marshy lagoon, instead of the splendid docks or noble quays of our own time, we might have seen a few boats or barges in which the merchant seaman plied his trade, or some half-decked warships, which would seem to us insignificant by the side of the smallest of our gunboats.

Now practically the whole country has the appearance of a garden, in which may be seen stretches of park-land with gigantic trees rising from sward always soft and green, and casting their shadows upon sumptuous palaces un-

guarded by battlemented towers or bastions. But in the days of Æthelstan and of Alfred, and still more in those of Æthelbert, who welcomed Augustine to Canterbury, the greater part of the land was covered by dense forests or reedy swamps. Rich tracts of pasture and meadow in our midland counties were then vast inland seas, from which the higher eminences rose as islands, like the isle of Ely, which served as a camp of refuge for Hereward and his followers in the days of William the Conqueror.

CHAPTER XXIII.

OLD ENGLISH HOUSES AND HOME LIFE.

FOR magnificence and splendour, no private abodes of any period have surpassed the princely mansions of the Elizabethan age. But when we turn from such homes as those of Longleat and Montacute to the house of a king or of a powerful noble in the time of the earliest sovereigns of Wessex or Northumbria, we find ourselves in an abode which must for us be singularly cheerless and unattractive.

The readers of Sir Walter Scott's "Ivanhoe" will be familiar with the striking picture which he draws of Cedric the Englishman in his great dining-hall, with its raised dais for the table, at which sat the master and his guests,

looking down on the humbler board where the retainers and servants were gathered. But although here in the time of Richard I. the house and its furniture had the benefit of the advance made in taste and luxury through more than five centuries, yet the walls of the lady's room are described as "so full of crevices, that the rich hangings shook to the night blast, and the flames of the torches streamed sideways into the air, like the unfurled pennon of a chieftain."

In the days of Ælle and Cerdic there would be but little of that wealth of embroidery and gilding which imparted a character of magnificence, if not of comfort, to the homes of the kings who could raise the sumptuous and majestic pile of Westminster Hall. Such buildings as they had were of wood, stone being a material very rarely employed. The rooms had either no windows or mere slits without glass, such glass as they had being reserved for the church or the chapel. From a stone hearth in the middle of the hall the smoke curled up to a hole in the roof above. This one room served for meals by day, and as a resting place for the men by night, the women sleeping in a building provided for them in the courtyard.

The mansion of a rich Englishman of the seventh century is thus a collection of separate huts, each containing one or at most two

rooms, the whole group being fenced round with a wooden palisade surrounded by a moat. Some chairs, benches, and tables constitute the whole furniture of the hall. The women's bower has further some chests for holding plate and linen, and here are the spinning wheels and other appliances for the tasks which furnish the clothing of the household. The kitchen held the brewing vats, and the mills in which women slaves ground the corn. Near it was the forge at which was done all such blacksmith's work as might be needed.

In short, things were so arranged that the house might, so far as was possible, supply the wants of all its inmates for food or for clothing,—a sure sign of the absence of general trade or of anything like a division of labour for the production of wealth. For Englishmen of the present day the nearest approach to such a condition of things would be found perhaps in the remotest backwoods of Canada or the United States; but even here our modern civilisation intrudes itself, and the whistle of the railway engine is heard in the forests or along the prairie almost as soon as the first settlers have cleared a space for their log hut or shanty.



THE STOCKS.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FEUDALISM, AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE.

BETWEEN the home of an Englishman now, and the abode of an Englishman a thousand years ago, there are other differences which are even less pleasant. In the courtyard fronting the house stood the stocks and the whipping post for the punishment of refractory slaves or of importunate vagrants and beggars. We resent the thought of any penalties except such as are inflicted by public law ; but from the days of Hengist onwards slavery was in England a recognised and an established usage.

The earliest Teutonic invaders may possibly have brought slaves with them. If they did not, they soon obtained plenty in the multitude of their Welsh captives. Freeman, again,

were reduced to slavery by legal sentence for various offences ; and for these, as for the rest, the children followed the condition of their fathers. So it was also with those who, under pressure of famine or starvation, sold themselves to a master.

But this was far from being the limit of this deadly evil. The temptation to trading in human flesh acquired a tremendous power, especially over the men of Northumbria, who are described as merciless kidnappers, selling even their near kinsfolk into foreign slavery. An active trade in slaves was carried on with Ireland ; and in this infamous traffic the city of Bristol earned a horrible notoriety.

The Witan of Æthelred passed laws against this iniquity; but while they condemned the selling of Christian men out of the land, and especially the selling of them to heathen masters, they attached no definite penalties to the offence, and their condemnation went for nothing. The voice of Wulfstan, Bishop of Worcester (1062-1095), was more powerful. The saintly English prelate fearlessly denounced the most intolerable wrong that one man can inflict upon another.

But practically all the horrors of slavery were endured in equal intensity by the greater part of the population of England. The largest of the classes comprised in the English commonwealth was that of the

degraded ceorls, or churls, who could not quit the land on which they were born, or free themselves from the master to whom that land belonged. But even this condition of villenage was mitigated gradually by Christian influence and teaching, and by the opportunities of winning enfranchisement furnished to them by the law. The institution of villenage died away in the course of ages ; but no enactment ever formally decreed its abolition.

The relation of the villein to his lord brings us to the subject of feudalism, which is commonly supposed to have been introduced into this country by the Norman conqueror. The statement is true only if we take the word as denoting the system in its maturity and completeness. In germ and in principle it existed among Englishmen and Saxons probably before they crossed the seas from the mouths of the Oder and the Elbe. In its essence it is nothing more than the faith which is pledged by the vassal to his lord on condition that the lord keeps his faith with the vassal. The violation of this faith on either side was declared by Alfred to be an inexpressible offence ; and the desperate resolution with which it was maintained led often to the most bloody and disastrous catastrophes.

The same principle, which, so far as the state was concerned, made one man responsible for the conduct of another, was shown generally

in the whole English polity. The institution of tithings, ascribed to Alfred, either subdivided the hundred, or was an association of ten neighbouring families, the members of which were responsible for the behaviour of each one of their members. If one of them, having committed an offence, fled, the penalty for his deed was assessed on the tithing to which he belonged. Nor was the idea which lay at the root of compurgation essentially different.

Among the modes in which a criminal was allowed to vindicate his innocence was the process by which he declared solemnly that he was not guilty, and brought forward a body of compurgators who asserted their belief in the integrity of his oath. This declaration, or compurgation, they made not from their acquaintance with the circumstances of the case, but simply from their knowledge or opinion of his general character.

The number of these compurgators was usually twelve; and in this body many see the origin of our more modern trial by jury. But the functions of the juror and the compurgator differ widely. The latter simply expressed an opinion of his neighbour's character without having necessarily any knowledge of the facts: the former draws his conclusion from the facts alone, without having necessarily any acquaintance with the prisoner.

A large number of crimes could, as we have

seen; be atoned for by money payments. The practice had a most mischievous effect on the administration of justice generally. It familiarised the people, and every class of the people, with bribery; it opened the flood-gates of corruption, and between the commission of a crime and the infliction of the punishment it interposed delays which made many shrink from seeking redress at the hands of the law as a hopeless and impracticable task.

This tendency to corruption was increased by the fact that a part, if not the whole, of the fine went to the judge, or lord of the court. Hence money might be used either to hasten or to hinder his action, or to prevent it altogether, while the substitution of the lesser penalty in cases of murder furnished an excuse for the deadly feuds, which, set on foot by the avenger of blood, led to the commission of a series of murders extending often over many generations.

Lastly, this principle which lay at the root of feudalism, of compurgation, and of villenage, and which made each unit in the commonwealth—be it the mark, the tithing, the hundred, or the shire—virtually an independent community, tended to check the growth which alone could convert an aggregate of tribes, more or less jealous of each other, into a coherent and organized whole. Hence before the Norman conquest we have an English people, but not, in strictness of speech, an English nation.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE REIGN OF CNUT (CANUTE).

THE reign of Cnut as king of all England was on the whole a season of peace not unlike that which the country had enjoyed in the days of Eadgar. We could scarcely have stronger proof of Cnut's ability as a ruler than that which is furnished by this fact alone. Had he been the mere pirate or marauder, had his one purpose been the extortion of money or the torturing of his subjects, the result must have been constant restlessness and tumult, and a general lapse of the kingdom into a worse state than that in which he found it. But whatever change there was, was decidedly a change for the better, and this in spite of many acts of violence and even crime on the part of the king against some of the most prominent among his people.

Cnut felt that his first task must be to guard himself against competitors for his throne. Æthelred and Edmund Ironside had both left children behind them. The two sons of the latter were mere infants ; but Cnut, resolved to be rid of them, sent them to his half-brother Olaf, king of Sweden, to be put to death. Olaf, shrinking from the deed, sent them on to Stephen, king of Hungary, by whom they were carefully nurtured. The Ætheling Eadwig, brother of king Edmund, was, by

Cnut's order, treacherously murdered. The sons of Æthelred and Ælfgifu-Emma, Edward (afterwards the Confessor) and Alfred, were safe with their mother in Normandy.

It may possibly have been from the motive of guarding himself against dangers in this quarter that Cnut now offered to marry their mother, a woman much older than himself. The neutrality or friendship of Duke Richard might perhaps have been as well secured by a marriage with one of his daughters ; but the strange proposal was eagerly accepted by Duke Richard's sister, and Emma, crossing the sea, became once more the Lady of England.

Cnut was already the father of two sons, one of whom, Harold, surnamed Harefoot, succeeded him ; but Emma bargained that the succession should be confined to her sons and his, if there should be any such. They had one son, Harthacnut (Hardicanute) ; and he too became king.

But Cnut was not yet at rest. He did not stick at murder, when murder seemed the only way of attaining his ends ; but he was perhaps better pleased to work his will under shelter of the forms of justice. From the Gemot which assembled in London at the Christmas of 1017 he obtained a sentence of death against many prominent men, who were accused perhaps (although the fact is not stated) of plotting against the king. Otherwise it seems hard to

account for a series of judicial murders in all the instances mentioned except that of the veteran traitor Eadric.

Whatever may be the difficulties in this man's history, there is no doubt that he fully deserved any punishment which might be inflicted on him. The tale last told of him is that when Eadric at this Christmas Gemot boasted of his exploits and his services, Cnut, turning to Eric, whom he had made Earl of Northumberland, said, "Let him get what he has earned, that he may not betray me as he betrayed Æthelred and Edmund," and that thereon Eric cut him down.

The title of Earl now displaced that of Ældorman for the governor whether of a sub-kingdom or of any shire of a kingdom, and also of the four great Earldoms, into which England was divided. Cnut reserved to himself the administration not of East Anglia or Northumberland, where a large proportion of the people was Danish, nor yet of Mercia, but of the purely English Wessex. It is clear that Cnut looked on himself simply as continuing the ancient line of the English kings, and that he was steadily resolved on keeping out of sight everything which might remind his subjects that they were ruled by a foreigner.

The following year (1018) was marked by the payment of a heavy Dane-geld, the importance of London being shown by the fact that the sum levied on the city was one-seventh

of the sum demanded from the whole country. Cnut now paid his fleet, and sent to Denmark all the ships except forty, the crews of which were made to form a force known as the king's Thingamen or Housecarls. They served as a body-guard, and were not without points of likeness to a standing army.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE REIGN OF CNUT (CONTINUED).

MORE significant, perhaps, than Cnut's choice of Wessex for his own abode, was the demand made by the Gemot, gathered this year at Oxford, for the governing of the land by the laws of king Edgar. We shall meet with the like cry repeatedly in the course of our history. The demand in the days of the Conqueror or of his son the Red King, will be for the laws of king Edward, the sainted Confessor; but neither Edward nor Edgar was noteworthy for any laws passed by himself. The cry, therefore, was for government by the laws which those kings obeyed and enforced, and these were laws which the people through their Witan had had a voice in passing for themselves.

The cry was thus virtually a demand on the part of the people for a share in the work of government, and more particularly for a rule

which should go by law and not by the chance will of one man. But it seems strange to find the Danish portion of Cnut's subjects joining in this cry as eagerly as the English. It is not unlikely that the Danes may have been even alarmed by the English leanings of their king, who had chosen Wessex as the seat of his power, and seemed more ready to listen to English than to Danish counsellors. They would, therefore, naturally think not of Æthelred, of whom all his subjects had equal reason for being ashamed, but of his father Edgar, who so long as he was king kept the land in peace, and showed himself specially the friend of the Danes (p. 88).

Cnut, it must be frankly admitted, felt the justice of the demand, and ruled henceforth in accordance with its spirit. For the seventeen years of his reign England had a respite from invasions, rebellions, and tumults. If Cnut was unjust or severe, it was to his Danish, not to his English subjects ; and it is certain that the memory which he left in Denmark is in strange contrast with the better name which he won in this country.

He had been king here five years before he revisited his native land. His return was followed, we are told, by an expedition against the Wends, in which an Englishman named Godwine did special service. Starting by night without Cnut's knowledge, he stormed the

Wendish camp; and Cnut, alarmed in the morning by Godwine's absence, which he set down to treachery, hurried up only to find the enemy destroyed, and the Englishman master of all their spoil.

Whether the story be true or not, Godwine from this time remains the foremost man in Cnut's kingdom. Who or what he was by birth, it is impossible to say, and it is not worth while to examine a number of inconsistent stories. But it is certain that he married Gytha, the sister of the Danish Earl Ulf, who had introduced him to Cnut, and that, in 1020, Cnut made him Earl, or Viceroy, of Wessex.

For the rest of Cnut's reign it is his highest praise that there is little or nothing to be said of it. The people were ready to dwell not so much on the darker acts of his life as on stories which related his rebuke of the courtiers who declared their belief in his power to rule the tides. Their affection grew warmer for the king who could order his chair to be placed on the shore, and when the waves came up and wetted his feet, could read the bystanders a lesson of the humility needed in the highest as in the lowliest of men.

Seven or eight years before his death Cnut made a pilgrimage to Rome, from which he addressed a letter to his subjects, giving an account of all that he had seen, and mentioning

that, with the Burgundian king Rudolf, he had been present at the coronation of Conrad as Emperor. This coronation took place in 1027, and this, therefore, is the date of Cnut's pilgrimage.

The letter speaks more especially of Cnut's feelings and convictions as to the duties of kings and rulers. "I have dedicated my life," he says, "to the service of God, to govern my kingdoms with equity, and to do justice in all things. If by the violence or heedlessness of youth I have thus far dealt unjustly, it is my purpose, with God's help, to make full amends." It can scarcely be said that Cnut's evil deeds and crimes had been bounded by the days of his youth; but it is beyond doubt true, that with all his failings and sins he was, as a ruler, worthy of being ranked with the best among the kings who had reigned over Englishmen.

CHAPTER XXVII.

REIGNS OF HAROLD AND OF HARTHACNUT.

CNUT died at Shaftesbury towards the close of the year 1035. He had expressed a wish that Harthacnut (his son by Emma), who was absent in Denmark, should succeed him on his English throne; and this arrangement was supported by Earl Godwine and the West

Saxons. Whether Cnut had any definite scheme for the division of his vast empire, we cannot say; but London, Mercia, and Northumbria declared for his son Harold (Harefoot), probably on the ground that under Harthacnut Denmark and Norway were likely to become mere dependencies of England, whereas they were resolved to have a king such as Swend had been during the few days or weeks that he reigned after the deposition of Æthelred.

A Witenagemot, held to decide the matter, resolved on a division of the kingdom. Harthacnut was to reign to the south, and Harold to the north of the Thames. But as the former was in Denmark, engaged in a struggle with the Norwegian king, his mother and Godwine acted in his stead.

He had not been king many months, when the Ætheling Ælfred, the son of Æthelred and Emma, landed in England, accompanied perhaps by his brother Edward, in the hope of obtaining the crown of his half-brother. All that is known with certainty about the matter is that Ælfred was seized, and that he was put to death by Harold, with the approval, it was said, or with the help of Earl Godwine.

Four years later Godwine was tried on the charge, and was formally and solemnly acquitted. The acquittal, we can scarcely doubt, was just; but it is necessary to bear in mind what the case really was. Ælfred entered the

kingdom as a pretender to the crown, and therefore as the disturber of a settled government; and in almost all ages and countries the punishment for such an offence has been death. In England, so late as the last century the punishment legally involved the infliction of tortures quite as horrible as those with which Harold is said to have slain his half-brother.

If, then, Godwine had arrested Ælfred, he would have done no more than his plain duty. If he had acted as his executioner, he would not have gone beyond the law; but it is more likely that he intended to take his part, and therefore went to see him, and that when the young prince was seized by the servants of king Harold, the fact of Godwine's abandoning his cause was taken as evidence that he had betrayed him. It would be no difficult task for Harold's messengers to seize the prince while he lodged in a town near the borders of the northern kingdom; and Godwine, though he might be disposed to befriend him, was not bound to interfere by force in his favour. Claimants of crowns must face the risks involved in their enterprise.

For the present Harold's star was in the ascendant. Wearied with waiting for a king who would not or could not leave Denmark, the men of Wessex deposed Harthacnut (1037), and for three years Harold remained king of the whole land. Meanwhile, Harthacnut, having

come to terms with his Norwegian enemy, was resolved to strike a blow for the crown which he had lost, and for this purpose he joined his mother Emma, who, being banished from England, had taken refuge with Baldwin of Flanders, the father of Matilda, the future wife of William the Conqueror. Here he got together a large fleet; but before he could sail he received the tidings of his brother's death, and learnt that by the choice of the Witan he was King of all England.

Within two years (June 1042) Harthacnut himself died, the chronicler tells us, "as he at his drink stood." His reign was as miserable as his end. His subjects were oppressed by a singularly heavy assessment for Dane-geld—a tax which English and Danes alike had thought would be ended with the sovereignty of Cnut over both Denmark and England. The tax was levied by the Housecarls, two of whom were murdered at Worcester. Urged on, it is said, by Ælfric, the Archbishop of York, Harold ordered the burning of the town and the slaughtering of the inhabitants. All the great earls were sent against the city; but they contrived that the people should escape massacre, although they lost their houses and their goods in the flames.

Even before the burial of Harold, the Witan unanimously chose as their king the Ætheling Edward, son of Æthelred and Emma. The

election of the Danish Swend Estrithson, the nephew of Cnut, would have been, we can scarcely doubt, more in the interests of the kingdom; but the two last reigns had sickened the people of Danish kings, and no one perhaps cared to remember that the son of Edmund Ironside was now grown up to man's estate far away in Hungary. Of him they had no personal knowledge; and of our modern notions of primogeniture they had not the least notion. If a man belonged to the royal stock, this was enough; and Edward not only fulfilled this condition, but was near at hand to enter on his work as king.

If we are tempted to judge Edward too harshly for the follies of a miserable life, we must remember that he had ceased to be an Englishman, and that he must have been gifted with more than usual steadfastness if he had remained one. Driven from England with his mother, the Norman Emma, when he was still a child only nine years old, he spent nearly thirty years in the Norman court, and then came back to England to all intents and purposes a Frenchman. Nor was this all. He came back intolerant of everything English, hating English manners and modes of life, hating the English language, and hating the lot which forced him away from that contemplative life for which alone he had in truth any fitness.

Essentially his character was much like that of his father—indolent for the most part, but liable to sudden outbreaks of activity at the wrong time ; the difference being that Edward aimed at the saintly life after the monkish ideal of the time, while his father was contented with the gratification of his bodily appetites. Edward was virtually a monk, with all the tastes and desires of a monk, except in his fondness for hawking and hunting. For these sports he had a liking which from one point of view seems absurd, from another amazing.

It has been well said that men were not wanting even in the eleventh and twelfth centuries who could feel for the sufferings of brute creatures hunted to death, and that the true Saint Anselm not merely sheltered the poor animals which sought refuge at his feet, but dwelt earnestly on the duties which men owe to them. Such a thought as this never entered Edward's mind. He would pass from his meditations and prayers to the field in which the tortures of beasts or birds offered him the keenest physical delight of which his cold and sluggish nature was capable. If in the prosecution of this amusement he was thwarted or opposed, he could give utterance to very unsaintly words. A churl, we are told, resented a trespass on his land ; and Edward at once cried out with such rage as he could feel, " By God and His mother, I will hurt you some day

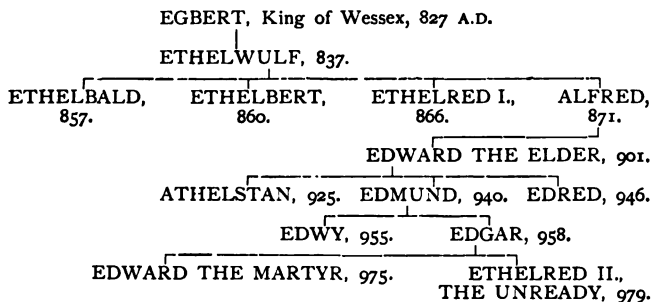
if I can." Probably Anselm would have had no kindlier greeting had he shielded a stag or a fox in whose trail the Confessor was riding. The descriptions of his person leave no doubt that the king was what is called an albino.

Edward thus came to England, resolved to make his kingdom as nearly like Normandy as possible. To attain this end he could think of no better plan than that of filling the important posts of the state or of the church with his Norman friends. This practice was the cause of some unlooked-for disasters in his own time; it led directly to the enterprise of the Norman duke against the country after his death.

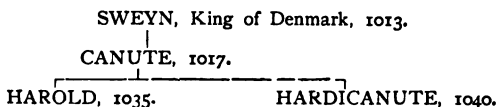
The man who had secured Edward's election to the crown was Godwine, the great Wessex Earl, who was charged with caring little for bishops or monks, with doing nothing towards the founding of any monastic houses, with caring too much for the aggrandisement of himself and his family, but who also won the praise of a rigid administrator of justice, and the fame of an orator whose speeches could make a marvellous impression on the free assemblies of the Witan. The success, and in no less degree the failure of his eloquence, furnish conclusive proof of the growth of the English constitution in and before the eleventh century. The Norman Conquest wrought in this respect a marked and long-enduring change for the worse.

GENEALOGICAL TABLES.

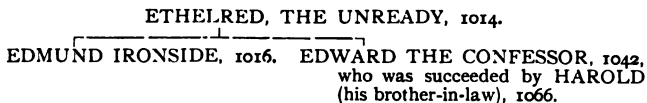
SAXON LINE.



DANISH KINGS.

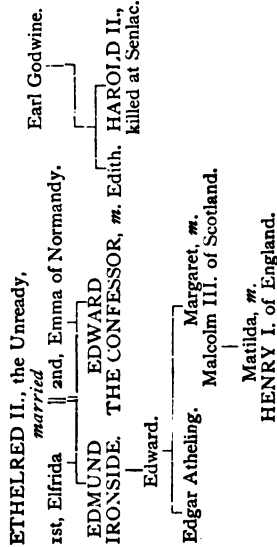


SAXON LINE (restored).



TABLES SHOWING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE NORMAN AND THE SAXON LINES.

SAXON.



NORMAN.

